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EROS AND LIBERATION IN CHRISTIANITY: TOWARDS ILLUMINATION
AND AFFIRMATION VIA THE FLAHERTY TRADITION

by
Jonathan Loring

A dissertation
submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Religion
School of Theology at Claremont

June, 1974

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Jonathan Loring

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requirements for the degree of*

DOCTOR OF RELIGION

Faculty Committee

W J Corgan
Harry Auer

Date.

Date May 13, 1974

Joseph C. Hays, Jr.

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IN GRATITUDE

Thanks to Jack Coogan, Harvey Seifert, and John Cobb--

thanks to Sue--

thanks to Frances and Robert Flaherty--

thanks to God for opportunities to see.

INTRODUCTION

In 1913 at the age of twenty-nine, arctic explorer Robert Flaherty began to explore the emerging art of film. When he died thirty-eight years later, he and his wife Frances had made four major films and had developed a tradition of film-making which has remained unsurpassed. The work of the Flahertys in this time, the Flaherty tradition, comprises a major contribution to human experience.

There is a methodology embodied in the work of the Flahertys. It involves such concepts as non-preconception, exploration, discovery, and revelation. How these are present will be examined below. There is some variation to the themes and contents of the films. Yet a predominant theme, of a universal nature, concerns the spirit with which man comes to terms with his environment; and this is a theme strongly tied to the methodology undergirding the Flaherty tradition. The methodology, which not only involves pioneering techniques of lasting significance to film, also extends into a profound view of reality--a sort of quasi philosophy; this will be considered as well.

Present in the Flaherty tradition--the films, the philosophy, the film-making techniques--are several areas of profound religious concern. It is my thesis here that: Eros and liberation are two contemporary religious concerns which

are extraordinarily illuminated in the Flaherty tradition. My thesis has two main foci: first, the assumption that liberation and eros are two areas of concern relevant to our present religious situation; and, second, that the manner in which these concerns are illuminated in the Flaherty tradition is worthy of exploration and analysis. The latter is more important to this dissertation.

The following methodology has been employed to support this thesis. First, I have made an extensive exploration and analysis of the primary materials of the Flaherty tradition; these include writings, films, and tape recordings made by the Flahertys. Second, I have investigated secondary materials, including writings on the Flahertys. Third, I have made use of some general and classic writings on film. Fourth, I have employed categories of process (or, Whiteheadian) thought, by virtue of its creative assistance in helping to illustrate my thesis. Fifth, I have investigated literature dealing with eros and liberation. Lastly, I have used some general writings on aesthetics in order to deal more satisfactorily with the art of film as developed by the Flahertys.

To set forth this dissertation, I have chosen the following development. Chapter 1 will focus on the Flaherty tradition and bases for its understanding. This will be primarily of a descriptive and analytical nature.

Attention will be given to: (a) the basic attitudes and

approaches of the Flahertys in their work with film, (b) an elaboration, definition, and exemplification of major concepts integral to the tradition, and (c) a theoretical analysis of the film-making technique. Chapter 2, emerging out of the first chapter, will analyse how eros as a religious concern is illuminated in the Flaherty tradition. Here, eros will be considered both in terms of the film-making process itself and the contents of the films. Also, in this chapter, I will consider how we are to understand eros as a religious value: first, in the Flahertys' terms and, second, in Christian terms. The latter part of this task will involve the related work of Daniel Day Williams and John B. Cobb, Jr. Throughout this chapter, movement will be made towards a Christian affirmation of eros as conceived and illuminated in terms of the sensuousness of the Flaherty tradition. Chapter 3 will move on to focus on the concept of liberation, as a religious concern, as illuminated in the Flaherty tradition. Here, the discussion will move into a more philosophical dimension, as the work of Whitehead will be used to deal with liberation in the Flahertys' work. The ontological vision of reality developed by Whitehead will serve to elucidate that of the Flahertys. Discussion will proceed in terms of how both Whitehead and the Flahertys deal with their understandings of reality, as well as how both move in common directions towards their concern with liberation. With this, the

notion of liberation will be discussed as it is manifested in the work of each. Finally, a brief conclusion is offered which will serve to integrate the previous work, develop it, and provide fulfillment to my main thesis.

Chapter 1

THE FLAHERTY METHOD: IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

A camera sees. It is on this simple truth that much of the Flaherty tradition is based. Yet, with this, there is more.

Some say that there was no one method on which the films were based. Arthur Calder-Marshall, in his study of the Flahertys, implies that much that happened to make the films simply happened. And, one is inclined towards this view with editor Helen Van Dongen's account of the making of The Land, for instance. With 70,000 feet of film shot, Calder-Marshall (relying on Van Dongen's account) explains how Robert Flaherty sat in the projection room, screening the film over and over with Van Dongen, muttering to himself, "My God, what are we going to do with this stuff."¹ Calder-Marshall goes on to re-tell how Van Dongen, with no direction from Flaherty, tried to tune into the concern and vision implied in his cursory comments on viewing the footage and then to edit it accordingly. Thus, there is the impression of a vague and unsystematic method embodied in the Flaherty tradition--arising primarily here out of

¹Arthur Calder-Marshall, The Innocent Eye (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1963), p. 194.

Van Dongen's experience. Other instances, such as Flaherty's practice of shooting large amounts of film, as on *Aran*, not for rushes but for "tests" or even "shooting" a camera containing no film at all, reinforce a potential impression of "no method." Indeed, Mrs. Flaherty writes, "The films themselves do not give evidence of a method."²

Yet such an impression is unfounded. One implication of Calder-Marshall's work is that along with acknowledging the lack of method, one simply approaches the Flaherty films as a kind of mystery. And, indeed, one filmmaker Sir Carol Reed has confessed that he cannot discern how Flaherty achieved his cinematic effects and has categorized the method as "magic."³ Magic, or mystery, is rightly involved in the films but, I would contend, at a different level. There is much in the Flaherty method which may be described. It is a method which is unique in cinema. It is subtle and complex. Prior to considering the method, it is also possible to designate the bases which undergird the method. Once one goes a substantial distance in analysing the method, he can stop and observe, spiritually

²Frances H. Flaherty, The Odyssey of a Film-Maker (Urbana, Ill.: 1960), p. 9.

³Frances H. Flaherty, Speech at the National Film Theatre (London, October 26, 1958). Tape Cassette. School of Theology at Claremont Library.

reflect, and acknowledge finally some dimension of mystery. This process is that affirmed by Gabriel Marcel and Sam Keen in their approaches to the experience of wonder and mystery.⁴ With this area covered, there will be some basis for dealing with the religious concerns of eros and liberation as they are present in the films.

A. Bases

In the Flaherty tradition, bases and attitudes underlying the method may be distinguished. These are simple and are summarized in the phrase: wonder and love for life.

One basis of the Flaherty tradition is a concern with life. In Mrs. Flaherty's later work, she speaks of life and its rhythm virtually in primordial terms. Considering the film Seifrizz on Protoplasm,⁵ a film examining life microscopically, she writes:

That life is movement we all know. But we can see how deeply this is so in this beautiful film which shows us. . . the rhythmic flow, the measured movement, in protoplasm, the primordial stuff of which we all are made. . . . The beauty of this film is its simple and profound approach to this rhythmic mystery, taking us on

⁴Sam Keen, Apology for Wonder (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), Chapter 1.

⁵Seifrizz on Protoplasm, by William Seifrizz and J.M.B. Churchill, Jr. Distribution: Educational Film Library Association, 250 West 57th St., New York, N.Y. Copyright 1955. (Cited by Flaherty in Odyssey..., p. 39).

the one hand into physics and chemistry, and on the other into the realm of philosophy, religion, poetry. Leonardo da Vinci says, "Where there is warmth, there is life, and where there is life there is the movement of love." The movement of love, the mysterious rhythm of life--this is the life of film.⁶

The films of the Flahertys are strongly akin to Seifriz on Protoplasm. They too are beautiful films showing us "the rhythmic flow, the measured movement" of life. They too have a "simple and profound approach to this rhythmic mystery" of life. They too take us into "the realm of philosophy, religion, poetry." They too involve love as it is a part of life. Yet, the difference between the Flaherty films and the Seifriz film is that in the Flaherty tradition it is life perceived macroscopically, rather than microscopically, which one encounters. It is the same phenomenon, Mrs. Flaherty would contend; but, it is a phenomenon perceived from a different perspective. Mrs. Flaherty juxtaposes her account of the Seifriz film with a description of Flaherty's short film on the pottery-maker, a film concerned from a macroscopic perspective with the movement and life of a craftsman and his craft. In this film, the camera shows us the rhythm, movement, and love involved in this subject. Similarly, it is life perceived from this large perspective which comprises the contents of the major Flaherty films. Nanook, for instance, is based on the

⁶Flaherty, Odyssey..., p. 39.

Eskimos' total commitment to life in a barren wilderness. In Samoa, when the Flahertys had completed filming Moana and were leaving the island by a small boat, they were profoundly aware of the life of the dying Polynesian culture which was contained--"living"⁷--in the film cans they carried with them. It is often emphasized that a predominant theme common to all of the Flahertys' work is the spirit with which man comes to terms with his environment. This simple, profound, blindingly obvious concern is life.

This concern itself was manifested in love and wonder, the two other bases underlying the tradition. It is clear that if Robert Flaherty had two or three favorite words, these were "marvelous," "extraordinary," and "wonderful." Most of what he encountered in life was regarded in these terms. In his account of the making of The Land, for instance, Russell Lord writes, on traveling with Flaherty:

Everything was 'marvelous!'--the farms, the hotels in little places, the pinball games in the lobby, the apple-pie in dog-wagon restaurants, the prize-fights on the radio, the poker-games with matches for chips at night. Bob Flaherty had great gifts as a traveler.⁸

Also, for Flaherty on the bleak Aran Islands, everything was "marvelous," Pat Mullen records.⁹ Even at twenty-two,

⁷Ibid., p. 21.

⁸Russell Lord, quoted in Calder-Marshall, p. 191.

⁹Pat Mullen, Man of Aran (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1970), p. 199.

Flaherty found the Indians on Victoria Island, British Columbia, to have a similar quality.¹⁰ In making Elephant Boy in 1936 the Indian elephants were "extraordinary."¹¹ This attitude extended to man-made machines and gadgets as well, including the motion picture camera.¹² With this orientation to life, Flaherty exhibited a humility and openness towards the things he encountered. Thus, one characteristic of the films is the quality of Flaherty's camera looking at the various subjects, rather than down at them. This attitude may be seen too in the Flahertys' willingness to go anywhere to make a film; for, Flaherty believed, in any subject there was at least one great film.¹³ Despite hardships, the Flahertys enjoyed their wondrous exploration of life.

For the Flahertys, coupled with wonder was love. Chapter 2 will concern the matter of love in the tradition; yet, here, a few points may be made. Jean Renoir speaks of Flaherty's "system" of film-making as being "just to love

¹⁰Reference is made to an account by T.H. Curtiss in Calder-Marshall, p. 25.

¹¹Calder-Marshall, p. 181.

¹²Ibid., p. 192.

¹³Frances H. Flaherty, KCET Interview (NET). Tape Cassette. School of Theology at Claremont Library.

the world, to love humanity, to love animals. . . ."14 This love for a subject is manifested early in Nanook. Mrs. Flaherty says that Flaherty's love for the Eskimo "overflowed."¹⁵ Flaherty regarded going North to the lands of the Eskimo as "going home"; "I go to come back," he said.¹⁶ In many of the films, Flaherty's love for traditional crafts is seen: a love both for the artifact itself and the process that produced it. More broadly, he loved people as they in their authentic ways were coming to terms with their worlds. Love, for Flaherty, was expressed in a positive way. He filmed the Eskimos, who were affirming life while being close to death. He did not concern himself on film with particularly negative aspects of his subjects. Thus, for instance, his love for the spirit of man as expressed by the Aran islanders did not involve a sociological treatment of rental abuses of absentee landlords, to which the people were victims. Flaherty's love accentuated the positive, in its encounter with life.¹⁷

¹⁴Jean Renoir, quoted in Calder-Marshall, pp. 248-249.

¹⁵Quoted in Calder-Marshall, p. 103.

¹⁶Flaherty, Odyssey..., p. 13.

¹⁷An exemplary instance of this concern is found in director John Huston's account of Flaherty's treatment of a young black man who was in the process of assaulting Huston, late one night. In Calder-Marshall, p. 206.

Wonder and love for life--in these words, then, are found the essential bases for the Flaherty tradition. This general spirit, incidentally, is found also in Flaherty's art of storytelling (an art distinct from film),¹⁸ in which one also senses the love and wonder for life which Flaherty had.

B. The Method Itself

These bases are distinct from the Flaherty method itself. Central to the method are four terms requiring examination; these are non-preconception, exploration, discovery, and revelation. It is to these that Flaherty's cinematic techniques, discussed in the next section, are related.

These four concepts derive from the simple statement that a camera sees. The simplicity of this truth is deceptive. The ability of the camera to see is affirmed as intrinsically valuable in the Flaherty tradition. It is the experience of seeing which is itself valuable. This affirmation contrasts with our ordinary experience of seeing, in which seeing is regarded as instrumentally valuable; we see a tree, for instance, so as not to walk into it rather than to look at it--see it--as something

¹⁸These stories of Flaherty may be heard on Tape Cassette at the School of Theology at Claremont Library.

mysteriously beautiful in its colors, shape, and form and to regard this seeing as good in itself.¹⁹ John Grierson has called attention to Flaherty's awareness of the power of the camera for "imaginative natural observation."²⁰ Grierson notes that Flaherty was his own first cameraman. He, unlike most other directors, took time to look through the camera, as it was for him primarily in the camera lens that the heart of the film-making process lay. Grierson writes further that Flaherty "spoke almost mystically of the camera's capacity for seeing beyond the mortal eye to the inner quality of things."²¹ In the Flaherty tradition, this seeing of "the inner quality of things" may contribute to the viewer's perception of an inherent relatedness of all things. By virtue of this kind of seeing the viewer may be put in touch with the universal truth of the ultimate relatedness of all life, Mrs. Flaherty contends. In the Flaherty tradition, seeing is integral and complex.

Iris Barry said, "The camera is a machine for seeing more than meets the eye;"²² for Flaherty this is true. From

¹⁹Professor W. Jack Coogan has been especially helpful in clarifying this for me.

²⁰Forsyth Hardy (ed.). Grierson on Documentary (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1947), p. 59.

²¹Ibid.

²²Iris Barry, quoted in Richard Griffith, The World of Robert Flaherty (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pierce, 1953), p. xii.

the Eskimo, whose survival depended on the ability to see fully, Flaherty learned to see the world as never before. For him, the similar ability of the camera to see (as the Eskimo) was striking and vital. Part of the Flaherty approach was thus to ask the camera, "What is this mystery you can see better than I can see?"²³ And in so doing, Mrs. Flaherty writes, "Bob gave himself up to the camera. We filmed and filmed. We went mad with filming; letting the camera see everything and see it exhaustively."²⁴ This ability of the camera to see--in visual terms, beyond words --relates to the Flaherty tradition's illumination of the religious concerns of eros and liberation. This matter will be taken up again in Chapters 2 and 3.

For the Flahertys, four elements are involved in the process of seeing. The first and most important is non-preconception, a pre-condition to the remaining three. It simply means that as one sees he does not pre-conceive what he might or might not see. Mrs. Flaherty provides a good description, here, writing:

What you have to do is let go, let go every thought of your own, wipe your mind clean; fresh, innocent, new-born, sensitive as unexposed film to take up the impressions around you, and let what will come in. This is the pregnant void, the fertile state of no-mind. This is non-preconception.²⁵

²³British Broadcasting Corporation, "Portrait of Robert Flaherty," Tape Cassette. School of Theology Library.

²⁴Flaherty, Odyssey..., p. 20.

²⁵Ibid.

It was by way of non-preconception that the Flaherty process of film-making succeeded. The making of Moana provides a good example here. With directions from Paramount to "bring back another Nanook," Flaherty set out for Samoa. Upon arrival, he encountered barriers; the things which had made the previous film were not present in Samoa. Making another Nanook would be impossible. Only after Flaherty stopped searching for the things he had anticipated or "pre-conceived" would be part of the film on the Polynesian culture--the non-existent giant octopus, the sea-monsters, and so on--did he begin to see the things which would naturally come to make a very different but nevertheless true film. Mrs. Flaherty recalls how after a long and arduous search for the things that did not exist, Flaherty sat for weeks, disappointed, letting all of his thoughts "fall away" and thus gradually entering a state of non-preconception. Only then did he become aware of the magnificent things of Samoan life which did exist and which could be filmed.²⁶

It was because of the value they attributed to non-preconception that the Flahertys did not work from pre-planned scripts on their films. In instances when a producer demanded a script prior to production, Flaherty (as on Industrial Britain) delivered a script of a few

²⁶Flaherty, KCET Interview.

pages, half of which were blank with the others containing only a few words of a most general nature.²⁷ Here, especially, one may see the distinction of the Flaherty films, existing in contrast to the preconceived Hollywood theatrical films and the standard preconceived documentary films, such as those of Grierson or Pare Lorentz. The thrust of non-preconception is that in coming to a subject, one does so simply by experiencing it rather than by imposing pre-symbolized data on it. Interestingly, non-preconception accords with the way the Eskimo deals with his environment; the Eskimo has no word-equivalents for the verbs "to create" or "to make" and thus, similarly, does not impose preconceptions on the things he encounters.²⁸

Importantly, then, non-preconception equals non-imposition and, going to an extreme, equals non-exploitation--a matter having significance for eros and liberation, discussed later.

Without preconceiving, one sets out to explore.

Exploration, the second concept, is an intermediate step to discovery and revelation in the Flaherty tradition.

Robert Flaherty said, "All art is a kind of exploring. To discover and reveal is the way every artist sets about his

²⁷Calder-Marshall, pp. 137-138.

²⁸Edmund Carpenter, Notes on Eskimo Art, quoted at length in Calder-Marshall, pp. 69-72.

business."²⁹ In Flaherty's first film on the Eskimo, made before Nanook and accidentally destroyed soon after it was made, he explored with his camera; but, that was all. It did not involve discovery and revelation, characteristic of the work which followed; and it could not properly be called a film using the exploratory method, as could the later films. In his film-making, Flaherty let the camera see and explore as much as was possible; his procedure was like the empirical method of the scientist, seeing all that could be seen. His exploration was characterized by reverence. Again, like the Eskimo's method of reverent exploration, Flaherty would adhere to the question: "What is [this] intended for?" rather than "What can I use that for?"³⁰ The exploration thus lacked manipulation and exploitation; what was explored was allowed to be itself. In Louisiana Story one can see this way of exploration in the opening sequence of the young cajun boy exploring his way by canoe through the Louisiana swamp.

With this ability to explore comes the possibility for discovery. The sense of what discovery means to the Flahertys is conveyed by Iris Barry, writing generally on the motion picture:³¹

²⁹Quoted in Flaherty, Odyssey..., p. 11.

³⁰Calder-Marshall, p. 71.

³¹Quoted in Flaherty, Odyssey..., p. 41.

Its [i.e., the motion picture's] particular property is a sense of discovery, like that of an astigmatic person who sees a new and richer world when he first puts on his spectacles--a sensation of delight in seeing something with new depth and penetration, as if for the first time.

In the process of exploring the exterior of some thing, something of that thing's inner spirit is discovered.

Mrs. Flaherty quotes Pudovkin on this:

The basic aim of cinema is to teach people to see all things new, to abandon the commonplace world in which they live blindly, and to discover at last the meaning and the beauty of the universe.³²

Relevant, at a lesser level, is Orson Welles' observation that Flaherty caught the accurate (European) sense of texture in senses--what water, leather, and so on are really like.³³ An implication of discovery in this sense is that through it, one is transformed. Mrs. Flaherty writes:

The explorers, the discoverers, are the transformers of the world. . . . The artist, the poet, and the seer, who out of the crucible of new fact and new idea bring new life, new power, new motive, and a deep refreshment. They discover for us the new magic.³⁴

The implications here are treated later on.

Related to discovery is revelation. "Revelation" plays a distinct role in the writings of the Flahertys. What is involved is something more than discovery: it is the experience of a moment of truth, which the camera can

³²Pudovkin, quoted in *ibid*.

³³Orson Welles, on BBC "Portrait..."

³⁴Flaherty, Odyssey..., p. 11.

record and which can become on film and on the screen a timeless, revelatory moment. To be more precise, there is involved in revelation a new kind of seeing. It is not an intensification of normal seeing; that is, it does not involve a quantitative difference in one's act of seeing. Rather, there is a qualitative difference: the presence of a whole new type of seeing. W. Jack Coogan, analysing Mrs. Flaherty's experience, clarifies what is involved here.³⁵ In distinguishing the different types of seeing, he writes that "Mrs. Flaherty has used the analogy of an increase in temperature, a quantitative change, which turns ice into water and then into steam, a qualitative change, to suggest this difference."³⁶ He then quotes Mrs. Flaherty's own experience of this seeing, which may be said to be of a revelatory nature:

Samoa was my first experience of living, as Bob had lived so long, with people of another culture. They were friendly people. When we met they greeted me, "Talofa!"--my love to you. We would talk a little, perhaps about their children and my children. They would say "Manuia"--God be with you--and I had absolutely no feeling of being alien to them. Until this thing happened, and happened so suddenly, like a clap of thunder or a flash of lightning, that I remember it exactly, and exactly how I felt, as suddenly everything seemed to fall away from me, everything but the immediacy of the moment, and the presence, the overwhelming presence, of these most lovely people. For the first time I saw them. I saw them as I had never

³⁵W. Jack Coogan, "Some Notes Toward a Flaherty Study Center," Unpublished Paper. School of Theology. p. 10.

³⁶Ibid.

seen them before. And not only that: I saw every least thing as though I had never seen it before. It was as though I had come to some sort of threshold, and stepping over had come into a new world and found myself a new person.³⁷

Coogan, continuing, writes:

Three elements stand out: a sudden intensity of perception, an overwhelming sense of loveliness of that which is perceived, and a new sense of unity and oneness with it.³⁸

These are the qualities of revelation in the Flaherty method. It is the experience of revelation in these terms which is present in the Flaherty films.

Calder-Marshall remarks, accurately, that Flaherty did not work by inspiration but rather by revelation.³⁹ In the films, things are revealed gradually or abruptly; there is little or no anticipation of what is to be revealed. The revelation in the encounter happens. Apparently, this ability of the camera to reveal something in a radically new way was not understood by Flaherty; that is, it could not be discussed in discursive terms. On Man of Aran, Mrs. Flaherty writes how on some days, after shooting great amounts of footage of what they thought would be good material, Flaherty would take an occasional pot shot to use up a remaining small amount of film and how the material they worked so hard for would turn out to be inadequate

³⁷Quoted in *ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

³⁸*Ibid.*, p. 11.

³⁹Calder-Marshall, p. 170.

while the casual pot shot would turn out to be a "revelation."⁴⁰ Similarly, often only one of several of the same sequences shot over and over (e.g., the land sequence in Aran), somehow, mysteriously, would turn out to be revelatory. In filming, Flaherty (once again like the Eskimo, as with his carving of ivory) did take an active role in allowing for revelation to come to be in the camera and on film. In this process he allowed the object being filmed its own integrity and autonomy; he did not impose his points of view on it. Working in visual terms, the method was "the way of discovering or releasing, with its discipline of letting be. . .the exploratory way."⁴¹

With this, Richard Griffith notes, "Flaherty's films are classic as they deal with eternal things."⁴² They reveal eternal things. For the Flahertys, revelation relates to discovery; yet, a distinction exists in that the revelation has a universal or timeless character.

With the Flaherty method of non-preconception, exploration, discovery, and revelation, what emerge are concrete cinematic documents which are tied to the search, as Griffith says, for "the spirit of man."⁴³ Moreover, the films emerging from this method "are timeless in the sense that they do not argue, they celebrate. And what they

⁴⁰Flaherty, Odyssey..., p. 30.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 42.

⁴²Griffith, p. xiii.

⁴³Ibid., p. xiv.

celebrate, freely and spontaneously, is the thing itself [the subject of the film] for its own sake."⁴⁴ They are concretely related to all of life.

C. Cinematic techniques

Now, attention may be given to cinematic techniques which the Flahertys used along with their basic method. With an examination of these, one may more fully understand the Flaherty method and the uniqueness of the resulting films. Further, one may come to see how from this clarified context (comprised of method and techniques), the religious concerns of eros and liberation arise.

As I view the Flaherty films, I am struck by two features related to cinematic technique. The first is that among the four major films (Nanook, Moana, Man of Aran, and Louisiana Story), there is a similarity in the actual contents of the films--that is, strikingly similar subjects which the Flahertys "chose" to shoot, or, more correctly, contents which were shot and became a part of the finished films. The second, more important feature is that: of a vast range of cinematic techniques from which to draw, the Flahertys used and developed a good many. In considering the elements of film language, one discovers in reflecting on the Flaherty films that creative use was made of many of

⁴⁴Flaherty, Odyssey..., p. 11.

many of the tools of the language. This is significant because often the films exhibit a simple purity, giving no explicit evidence of their sophistication. To other films, they appear as Haiku poetry (with its small and simple use of grammatical tools) does to epic poetry of English literature. They exhibit a freshness and clarity, lacking in other films. Yet, the Flahertys' work embodies a variety of film techniques.

Regarding the first feature, I want to note what others have not: a large portion of the contents of the different films are strikingly similar. Here, I do not want to deny that the films are about concrete individual people doing the things of everyday life that are authentic to them; for example, I do not want to hold, as one critic has,⁴⁵ that *Nanook* represents "Man." Rather, I want to hold to the dimension of specificity present in the films, while pointing to the similarity.

To support this point, one needs only to compare a number of different aspects in the films. The number is large, as illustrated in the accompanying notation.⁴⁶ There

⁴⁵Riccioto Canudo, "Another View of *Nanook*" in Lewis Jacobs (ed.), The Documentary Tradition From Nanook to Woodstock (New York: Hopkinson and Blake, 1971), p. 20.

⁴⁶On the commonality of the subject material, consider, for instance, what might be loosely called "the hunt," a feature present in all of the major films: the walrus sequence in *Nanook*, the wild boar in *Moana*, the shark in *Aran*, and the alligator in *Louisiana Story* (with a similar

are differences in the films yet, also, a commonality. The significance of this is that as a result of it, one is more easily led to an understanding of the artistic vision of

trapping technique to that in Moana). Water plays a part in all of the films: the surf and ocean and rough seas in Nanook, the same in Moana and Aran, the river and swamps (and sea, from which the mermaids come) in Louisiana Story. With regard to people and their boats, there is Nanook and his kayak on the sea (and the boat launching), in Moana there is the outrigger canoe in the ocean and surf (and the boat launching), in Aran there are the men in the boats (carraghs) in the surf and ocean (and the boat launching), and in Louisiana Story there is the boy in his dugout canoe (piroque) on the river and swamps (and the boat launching). In each of the films people fish: Nanook with his ivory "bait" for salmon, within the coral reef in Moana, the boy Mikeleen from the cliffs in Aran (as well as the men in the ocean, for sharks), and the boy from his piroque and the derrick in Louisiana Story. Crafts and trades of one kind or another have a role in each film: igloo building and trapping in Nanook, dress-making and cooking in Moana, soil building and making lamp oil and boat repairing in Aran, the oil drilling and (less so) the father's trapping and skinning in Louisiana Story (with the shot of the rack of drying skins paralleling a similar shot in Nanook); each of these trades and crafts is examined carefully by the camera. The community of people and, more specifically, the clearly (or in Moana the vaguely) defined family with children is present in each film. Within each community (or family) of people in each film, one sees people similarly both in states of happiness and seriousness. Animals play roles in all the films, except slightly less so in Moana: the dogs and wolves and fox and seals and walruses of Nanook, the boar and turtle of Moana, the lamb and setter dog and chicken of Aran, the aligators and racoon and birds and skunk and deer of Louisiana Story. Further, the blizzard of Nanook exists in parallel to the storm of Aran. The opening scene of Moana with Pe'a "lost" in the large tropical plants is similar to the scene of the boy in the reeds in Louisiana Story, early in the film. In Nanook, Moana, and Aran one person in each builds a fire of peat or moss. Other parallels may be drawn. And, some of the parallels extend into the other films of the Flahertys. Often these similar scenes appearing in the different films are shot in similar ways as well.

the Flahertys. To be more specific: when a particular subject or scene appears in all of the major films, the Flaherty method and vision become more apparent. The method is used time after time for similar subjects. The viewer continuously experiences seeing, discovery, and revelation--perhaps to a greater degree each time. Out of this overall experience, including that of the artistic vision, arises spiritual concerns significant to man, two of which are subjects of this dissertation. While this commonality of the films is not unique to Flaherty, it at least requires acknowledgment.

With this is the additional technical characteristic that the films rely on many cinematic techniques. One can speak of a simple purity which the films have; however, this outward purity must be examined with care. The many techniques both derive from and reinforce the Flaherty method and lead further to the illumination of the religious concerns.

When dealing with cinema, there are certain general categories of reference available for use. An important one is the handling of space. This category is most important to the Flaherty films and is useful for gaining insight into the techniques of the Flahertys. Within this category, three techniques are vital: camera movement, framing, and cutting.

In the Flaherty films, camera movement is notable. The ability of the camera to see a whole scene (i.e., an area of space) objectively, and without regard to any one part of it, is an important fact providing a basis for the Flaherty method.⁴⁷ As mentioned, Flaherty in filming gave himself up to the camera to let it see all that it could. What emerged in terms of technique was a virtual addiction to letting the camera see and film extensively. This involved panning to a tremendous degree. Flaherty made pioneering use of the gyro-tripod as did no other filmmaker; he made consistent use of it in all of his work. In the "study footage," a collection of rushes from the making of Louisiana Story, one sees repeated panning shots scene after scene. One subject may be panned and panned. Flaherty's camera may pan over a particular subject, seeing one part and moving on to another part or to another subject. Some degree of truth comes in here by virtue of the true spatial relationship which is seen among various parts or subjects. In Nanook, such a spatial relationship is established in the walrus hunt. In Moana, one sees the relationship of the village to the sea as a result of one

⁴⁷Relevant here is the French word for lens, which is "objectif," and which gives a better sense of the nature of the camera lens than does the English word. It is this nature which Flaherty found significant. This comment is drawn from one by Hugh Gray (translator) of Andre Bazin, What is Cinema? (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), I, 13.

long pan. In panning, things are revealed to the viewer. A pan down the length of a boat in Aran reveals a large hole made by rocks in the surf. A beautiful pan in Moana reveals the relationship between the sleeping boy Pe'a and his parents. In filming crafts, Flaherty makes use of the pan as he captures the creative process involved in the craft. Closely related to the horizontal pan is the vertical tilt of the camera. In Aran, Flaherty tries to show the height of the magnificent cliffs by tilting up and down the 350 foot faces; (and in one instance he used nearly a foot of film for every foot of the cliff's height⁴⁸). Two nearly identical tilts in Moana, one down from the sky and down a tree to the ground where people are gathering food and later a tilt which is simply the reverse of this, make up two tilts which structurally frame this particular sequence of shots in the film. Flaherty made vast use of the pan and tilt in his films, in his effort to film life and movement.

Concerning tracking (i.e., the actual mobile movement of the entire camera unit), another part of camera movement, Flaherty made little use of this. This was due to technological limitations in the film-making circumstances. One major exception concerns his work in Louisiana Story, with the most notable shots being those early in the film where the camera moves as it follows the

⁴⁸Calder-Marshall, p. 143.

boy and glides its way through the swamp. The pan and tilt, in terms of camera movement, remain however as the major techniques used by Flaherty.

In the category of space in cinema, framing is also important to Flaherty and is related to camera movement. Framing, by definition, relates to the composition of a shot and involves questions of structure and balance and organization of the contents. It concerns what is seen and/or not seen. As Stephenson and Debrix point out, it may be a dramatic vehicle for contrast and surprise.⁴⁹ Relevant, too, is Bazin's observation that framing and the space of the motion picture screen has a centrifugal (or open-ended and inclusive) quality in contrast to the centripetal character of a framed painting or a theatrical stage.⁵⁰ This makes for a coherency among different shots.

First, framing is vital to Flaherty's camera movement. A good example of this is the long shot in Moana of Pe'a climbing the coconut palm. Here, the camera at some distance watches Pe'a begin to climb the trunk and to continue climbing and then climb right out of the top of the frame, momentarily. The camera, still shooting, then tilts to the upper portion of the tree to continue watching the

⁴⁹Ralph Stephenson and Jean R. Debrix, The Cinema as Art (Maryland: Penguin Books, 1969), p. 82.

⁵⁰Bazin, I, 105.

climb--and thus reveals the true height of the tree. Here, framing is used for a surprising or revealing effect. John Goldman, the editor of Aran, speaks of much of Flaherty's work under the category of suspense: not the kind of dramatic suspense of Hitchcock, for example, but rather a kind of visual suspense related to revelation. In many shots by Flaherty, he implies that with camera movement and framing, the revelation or important part of the shot is shown quickly at the end of the pan.⁵¹ The framing of the shot is progressively oriented to the subject, accordingly. Framing and camera movement are closely linked in Flaherty's work.

Second, framing is important in itself. In the films, the close-up has a useful role, less so in Nanook but especially so in Moana, Industrial Britain, and Louisiana Story. Its function is to enhance seeing. Particular subjects are seen closely and intently by the camera. Also involved in framing are long-distance shots. Again, Flaherty pioneered in the use of the long-focus lens and spoke emphatically of its value. The manner in which this contributed to the framing of a picture--and thus its balance and organization--is recounted well by Flaherty:

In middle-distance outdoor photography, . . . I learned the superiority of long-focus lenses. In photographing a Samoan dance in a grove of breadfruit

⁵¹John Goldman, quoted in Calder-Marshall, p. 160.

trees, instead of using a two inch lens from a position close to the dancers, I went some distance back and used a long-focus lens. There was no doubting the result. The figures were alive and real, the shadows softer, and the breadfruit trees seemed like living things rather than a flat background. . .

The greater the focal length of the lens the smaller the field, and, as a consequence, with the longer telephoto, the photographer is easily able to eliminate unnecessary details and to give his picture the emphasis he wants. This is important because good photography, like good writing, is largely a matter of emphasis.

. . . In brief, I owe almost everything to long-focus lenses.⁵²

A benefit of framing with the long-focus lens is an added degree of freedom gained by the subject being filmed; being some distance from the camera, a subject is more free to be itself. Shots of the boy in Louisiana Story illustrate this--the boy in the swamp, on the river, or on the derrick --as does the simple shot of the mother in the window peeling potatoes in the same film.

Finally, as an attribute of Flaherty's framing, there is the consistent lack of a self-conscious quality (on the part of the cinematographer) in the films. To clarify, Goldman has said that in making Aran, Flaherty would automatically reject any shot that was overly "self-conscious," i.e., having exceptional qualities of composition and photography; such a shot involved the imposition

⁵²Robert J. Flaherty, "Filming Real People," in Jacobs, p. 98.

of the personality of the photographer on the subject.⁵³ Thus, in framing, the subjects' natural state of existence is a criterion for the inclusion of a scene. Related to this is Flaherty's ambiguous and intuitive technique of shooting only "what the camera wanted to see." If a shot were suggested to him, he would at times say, "No, the camera doesn't want to shoot it. . . the camera doesn't see a shot like that."⁵⁴ Overall, framing is vital to Flaherty.

The third area of space in cinema is editing and montage. Editing is used for several purposes, including those for (1) the changing of a scene (or, the furthering of action), (2) the elimination of unwanted cinematic material, (3) the enhancement of a general picture of an object, (4) the making of one area of space appear larger, and, (5) the creation of the appearance of certain spatial relationships which do not really exist. This is a brief but sufficient list, suggested by Stephenson and Debrix,⁵⁵ though the properties of editing could be elaborated.

For two reasons, not much attention is paid to Flaherty's use of editing. One exception, noted above and dealing with "suspense," is Flaherty's practice of cutting a scene immediately following the point of revelation.

⁵³Goldman, quoted in Calder-Marshall, p. 157.

⁵⁴Robert Flaherty, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 156.

⁵⁵Stephenson and Debrix, pp. 69-71.

Another exception is the swamp sequence of Louisiana Story in which the small physical area of the swamp is made to look infinite, as a partial result of the editing. For the most part, though, little consideration has been given. The first reason for this is due to the predominating effect that exists as a result of Flaherty's important use of camera movement and framing. The second and more complex reason is that most critics acknowledge Flaherty's use of the ordinary "narrative montage" (discussed immediately below) and overlook his revolutionary use of "expressive montage" (defined below). Flaherty's expressive montage is overshadowed by narrative montage, camera movement, and framing. And, also, as will be explained, the organic process of Flaherty film-making camouflages further the expressive montage--that is, the expressive montage appears so naturally that it is easily overlooked.

To elaborate, definitions are initially in order. First, montage involves editing, the linking of at least two separate pieces of film of different shots. With this, Bazin defines montage as "the creation of a sense of meaning not proper to the images themselves but derived exclusively from their juxtaposition."⁵⁶ He speaks of montage, the combination of different images, as suggesting "an idea by means of a metaphor or by an association of

⁵⁶Bazin, I, 25.

ideas. . . . The meaning is not in the image; it is in the shadow of the image projected by montage onto the field of consciousness of the spectator."⁵⁷ This relates to Eisenstein's view of montage as being a whole representing more than the sum of its parts.⁵⁸ With this, Marcel Martin makes a useful distinction between narrative montage and expressive montage.⁵⁹ The former is characterized as weaker. It is usually more ordinary, having less color; the cutting tends to be more invisible, less apparent, than in expressive montage. The passing of time seems more natural, too. Narrative montage usually involves the elimination of excess material. Additionally, it tends to be more realistic (less artificial) than expressive montage. Expressive montage, on the other hand, involves the combination of images (taken in its extreme case) in a profoundly clashing manner; it is more artificial and may be more colorful than the narrative type. Bazin discusses three basic methods of montage which may be considered as subtypes to expressive montage. These include: (1) parallel montage, in which shots of action occurring simultaneously (or, apparently so) are inter-cut with one another; (2) accelerated montage, in which the sense of accelerating

⁵⁷Ibid., I, 26.

⁵⁸Discussed in Stephenson and Debrix, pp. 69-71.

⁵⁹Discussed in *ibid.*, p. 130.

time is given with the intercutting of different images; and (3) montage by attraction, defined as "the reinforcing of the meaning of one image by association with another image not necessarily part of the same episode."⁶⁰

In the Flaherty films, much use is made of narrative montage. In Nanook, Aran, or Louisiana Story, much of the action that transpires is presented in a linear progression, in spatial and temporal terms. Unnecessary material between sequences is eliminated. One distinct mark of Flaherty, however, is that unlike others' use of narrative montage, his use is colorful, especially real, and extraordinary--due to his use of camera movement and framing and, also, to his unique "organic" way of making an entire film. To discuss this requires a brief, though related, digression.

Both filming and screening of the rushes were an integral part of the film-making process for Flaherty. Abundant quantities of film were shot; the same subject was often filmed repeatedly. Pot-shots were taken, too.⁶¹ Once shot, the material was screened--screened repeatedly over days, weeks, and months until "true" sequences from the raw material began to emerge. Usually, the material was

⁶⁰Bazin, I, 25.

⁶¹Typical in this area is the account by Mrs. Flaherty on shooting, discussed above, pp. 20-21.

shown to the subjects of the films themselves in order to get their judgments on the truth and authenticity of the raw film.⁶² Goldman's account of this entire process, in the making of Aran, is typical; and it should be quoted here at length:

Flaherty's actual film-making took place not in the camera, not on the cutting-bench, but in the projection room. Here he would sit running through reel after reel over and over again, panning for the gold nugget, and the only criterion for the recognition of this nugget was his own bare awareness.

During this long, tedious process, there was no shape to the film, no beginning, no end. Imperceptibly shots would start to sort themselves, migrating from film-can to film-can and gathering like molecules round a nucleus. But there was no conscious thought directing it.

Then one day, months after the start, Flaherty would suddenly realize that he was looking at a sequence. It was a peculiar sensation. One day a mere collection of shots joined up together; the next, a perceptible semblance of a sequence, seemingly self-generated, organic, belonging. And that, so far as that sequence was concerned, was the end of the second stage in making the film.

The third stage began, similar to the second, but more demanding in patience and perception. Again the projectionists would work day and night. They would have endless strips of paper which they would insert in the reel of film on the projector when Flaherty pressed the buzzer in the theatre. "Cut that shot in half." . . . "Take out that long-shot, it's dead." From the first germ of life the sequence would start to grow up. First, the internal life in the individual shot, then the internal life in the sequence. I recall one sequence growing this way in life and then it seemed to wilt and die, stillborn. "We've been preconceiving," Flaherty said. And so every shot had to be broken down and shuffled up and the reel put back again into rushes.

⁶²An exception to this was in making The Land, where the people in the film did not have the usual part in contributing to its screening and editing.

Then individual sequences would be linked. Disaster. Whole sequences built up and grown after long months of loving care and fatigue would have to go. But never for one instant did Flaherty intrude on the film. Always he allowed it to grow from within.

Just as Flaherty was never concerned with the conscious composition of a shot, so you found the same attitude towards rhythm. The complex of shots, the sequence of shots grew from within and conformed to no preconceptions about rhythm and flow. The rhythm in the film flowed from life, not life from rhythm. If disjointed and jerky, maybe that's the way it was, you can't change it because it is not pretty and smooth.

. . . Flaherty did not work by inspiration but by revelation. . . .⁶³ [my emphasis]

A main point here is that a major product of this process was narrative montage--imbued with exceptional qualities; it is these qualities which critics emphasize in dealing with Flaherty's contribution to the art.

What remains to be discussed is Flaherty's use of expressive montage, a matter which has been neglected by scholars. In fact, Bazin states flatly that, for Flaherty, expressive montage "plays no part."⁶⁴ This view may be countered with further analysis.

Parallel montage, defined above, is the most commonly used type of expressive montage. A good illustration of it is the standard chase scene of the early silent comedies, in which shots of the people being chased were intercut with shots of those doing the chasing. D.W. Griffith

⁶³Goldman, quoted in Calder-Marshall, pp. 159-160. Similar is Helen Van Dongen's account of the same process, later on, in The Land, pp. 194-195, in Calder-Marshall.

⁶⁴Bazin, I, 26-27.

made use of this dramatically, as have numberless others since. Of the types of expressive montage discussed by Bazin, Flaherty made unique use of parallel montage. Unlike other film-makers, parallel montage for Flaherty is manifested in a social and subtly emotional context. A simple example is in Moana, where shots of Pe'a at the top of the coconut tree are intercut with shots of Moana on the beach, opening coconuts. A more dramatic usage is in the storm sequence of Aran, where shots of the men in their boat are intercut with shots of Mikeleen and his mother watching from the cliffs. One notable sequence using parallel montage where this social and emotional quality is profound is in the igloo building sequence of Nanook, where shots of Nanook making the igloo are intercut with shots of his children at play and his wife Nyla also working; this captures the family relationship. On this, Cecile Starr writes that this intercutting is as important as Griffith's, though it is "not used for speed and excitement, but for involvement and warmth."⁶⁵

Flaherty uses parallel montage more sophisticatedly in Louisiana Story. The film is basically a fantasy dealing with the resolution of the conflict between man, technology, and the natural world. In two exceptional sequences, elements of this problem are presented. The

⁶⁵Cecile Starr, "On Nanook" in her Discovering the Movies (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1972), p. 64.

first, early in the film, is the sequence in the marsh reeds where shots of the boy at peace in the setting are intercut with shots of the swamp buggy plowing its way through the reeds and destroying them. Similar is a second sequence in which, at dusk, shots of the boy in his canoe on the river (again, peacefully) are intercut with shots of men on the derrick involved in the violently noisy job of drilling.

A profound use of a kind of parallel montage is found in the entire film of Moana. This film, as Coogan points out, is structured in a non-linear, cyclic manner. Each sequence of the film is oriented to and built around the central ceremonial events of the siva dance, the tatooing, and the drinking of the kava. All of the scenes (including the gathering of the fruit and leaves, the boar hunt, the fishing, the coconut tree, the cloth making, the turtle hunt, the food preparation, the robber crab, the family, and the canoe fishing) exist in a cyclical, non-linear relationship to the most important scenes. What Flaherty achieves overall is akin to, but beyond, parallel montage. It has elements of "montage by attraction." Within the film's broad montage are all of the basic elements of Flaherty's work as well.

On the whole, note should be taken of the expressive montage present in the editing of the films; this element does contribute to their significance. It may be noted, too, that these sequences of expressive montage are the

result of the natural, organic process of film making; and they thus lack the clashing quality and artificiality usually found in expressive montage as used by others.

Related to space in cinema is the handling of time. Stephenson and Debrix distinguish three categories of time: physical, psychological, and dramatic.⁶⁶ All three are relevant to the Flaherty films. Physical time usually corresponds directly to time in reality. Individual shots come within this category; Nanook hunting the walrus is a good example here. Accelerated motion, slow motion, and stopped motion are also included under physical time; Flaherty used these devices to a degree--the first two, less so. Psychological time relates to the film viewer's sense of duration. Importantly, many elements of the films have what one psychologically experiences as a "timeless" quality. Many shots dealing with seeing and revelation have this quality, such as the swamp sequence in Louisiana Story. Goldman speaks of the storm sequence in Aran as having the "force of eternity."⁶⁷ Relevant here is Griffith's comment from above, "The Flaherty films are classic as they deal with eternal things."⁶⁸ Finally, there is dramatic time--the general time period over which the

⁶⁶Stephenson and Debrix, pp. 92-99.

⁶⁷Quoted in Calder-Marshall, p. 162.

⁶⁸Griffith, p. xiii.

film is perceived to take place. Nanook takes place over a few seasons; it is two or three weeks in Moana, uncertain in Aran, and perhaps months in Louisiana Story. None of these time periods are explicit in the films, however. Of the three types of time, the first two are most important in the films; they are related, with the sense of reality of the first contributing to the impact of the psychological sense of time.

Finally, in terms of techniques, attention may be given to other standard devices used by Flaherty. First, some scholars regard sound as being vital to the cinema; Bazin considers sound as the fulfillment of the silent cinema as the New Testament is the fulfillment of the Old Testament. In a strange way, despite the visual import of his films, this is so for Flaherty. Because of the technological limitations at the times of production, Nanook and Moana are silent. Yet, by the early 1930s, when sound film was possible, Flaherty made creative use of sound in Aran, in order to reveal more accurately the life of the islanders, (with the sounds of the language and of the sea). Louisiana Story has a beautiful musical score which, though not vital, enhances the film. Further, in the film both French and English dialogues are used with no subtitles being necessary--due to the visual quality of the film. Furthermore, these two languages--one representing a more technological orientation to life and the other a more

natural and provincial one--contribute to the basic theme of the film (as in the scene of the first encounter between the boy and the oilmen: they greet each other in their respective languages). There are two ingenious instances of sound montage, both in Louisiana Story, where (first) noise of the derrick is juxtaposed to the quiet of the river and (second) the noise of the swamp buggy is juxtaposed to the quiet of the reeds; these two instances are a part of the same two scenes discussed earlier under parallel montage. Finally, in this film, in the oil drilling sequences Flaherty pioneered in the use of a fully electronic sound track--as with the use of sounds which were part of the drilling process. Thus, a major dimension of cinema was accepted by Flaherty and used creatively.

With respect to other elements of cinema, color photography was not used by Flaherty. Use was made only of the more simple and abstract black and white. This again was probably due to the expense and lack of technology at the time. Some exploratory footage for Louisiana Story was shot in Kodachrome but not used in the film. Moana, however, was released in the 1920s with a beautiful gold tint. Most elements dealing with what is called the "surface of reality" (and including soft focus, double exposure, make-up, artificial decor and sets, and costumes or clothes not authentic to the subjects themselves) were not used by Flaherty. An important exception is the "surface of reality"

element of negative image--which Flaherty achieved naturally in the nighttime oil drilling sequence of Louisiana Story. The reality itself had the quality of a negative--even though it itself was not. Lighting is important to the films; most of the material was shot in early morning or late afternoon, because of the image of reality that could be achieved with this. (Again, a notable exception is the mysterious oil drilling sequence--shot at night, after first being filmed in daylight.)

These, then, are the basic cinematic techniques manifested in the films. Overall, the number of techniques creatively used was considerable. The effect in terms of the art created is profound, as we shall now see.

Chapter 2

EROS, AS A RELIGIOUS CONCERN, ILLUMINATED IN THE FLAHERTY TRADITION

The status of eros in Christian experience has long been a matter of debate. Early in the tradition, for example, there is Augustine's recognition that eros and the other human loves are good, as they participate in God's being; yet, at the same time, there is Augustine's tendency to devalue eros and the other human loves in relation to the all important love, agape, of God.¹ Later, in the Reformation, importantly, is Luther's formulation of a sharp distinction between eros and agape--this being against any earlier synthesis of the two--and thus the seemingly absolute and exclusive affirmation of agape as being the only form of love appropriate to Christian existence. This view has had a predominant effect subsequently. In the last few years, several theologians and other thinkers have attempted to recover and re-affirm the inclusion of eros within Christian life. This important work, still in progress, will be examined in this chapter. This recent work has certain themes and thrusts to which the earlier work of the Flahertys is relevant. My general

¹Specific definitions of eros and agape are below.

thesis here is that: eros, as a contemporary religious concern, is profoundly illuminated in the Flaherty tradition. Thus, the work of the Flahertys has important contributions to make to the present discussion. Also, in this chapter, as a result of examining these contributions, further progress may be made towards a clarified affirmation of the role of eros within Christian existence.

To pursue the task of this chapter, then, the following steps are in order. First, I will present a narrow definition of eros, independent of relevant and implicit religious dimensions. Second, focus will be given to the role of eros in the Flahertys' work, both in the contents of the films and in the production process. Third, the religious dimensions of eros will be treated. Then, with the insights gained from the work of the Flahertys, I will put forward an affirmation of eros within the context of a Christian structure of existence. Finally, some comments will be offered in summary.

A. THE NATURE OF EROS: TOWARDS A BASIC DEFINITION

The concept of eros is complex. It involves what superficially may be taken as contradictory elements. Also, its complexity has led to a variety of contrasting definitions, in which one or another of its elements are emphasized (sometimes to an unjustified extent) without due regard to the others. Thus, for example, Norman O. Brown

defines eros in terms of its possessive element;² and, John B. Cobb, Jr. emphasizes the "distancing" element.³ Further complications emerge when eros is defined in a more broad religious context; but, this will be taken up later. And, too, eros becomes more involved when it is treated along with such areas as wonder, festivity, and play--all matters with which eros may enjoy a close relationship; this, too, will be of concern later. For now, I am concerned with basic definition. For this, I have found the work of Rollo May to be very satisfactory and that of Paul Tillich and Cobb to be secondarily so. Cobb's work is useful for setting up a preliminary context. May's (and Tillich's) work is valuable for the definition itself.

To begin with the context, Cobb's work on the "structures" of human existence may be followed. In considering the structure of existence of Homeric man, Cobb maintains that as man's reflective consciousness undergoes the process of rationalization, there is in this process the element of "distancing," or objectification, on the part of man. With this, the internal (i.e., the point of view of man himself) is distinguished from the external;

²Norman O. Brown, Life Against Death (Middletown, Conn: Wesleyan University Press, 1970), p. 49.

³John B. Cobb, Jr., The Structure of Christian Existence (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967), p. 128.

and the latter is allowed its own autonomous existence.⁴ This is practical distancing. In a radical form, it becomes aesthetic distancing, in which (he writes), "the object is accorded its freedom also from the interests of the subject."⁵ Here, the receptive consciousness of the subject is emphasized; he is "open to being formed by what is given in the object."⁶ Involved, too, is "the suspension of our deep-seated habit of projecting symbols on the world."⁷ Aesthetic distancing, which played dominant roles in the experiences of Homeric man and Socratic man, is primarily manifested in visual experience in relation to the sensual world.

With this, Cobb later discusses aesthetic love as being the most important type of love for the Greeks. This is eros. He first posits a general definition of love, as "any mode of relating to an [impersonal or personal] object as a positive intrinsic value, in which conscious psychic activity is decisively involved."⁸ The subject is distinguished from the object in this definition. Aesthetic love, to Cobb, is thus seen as involving distance between the

⁴Ibid., p. 73.

⁵Ibid., p. 74.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid. Incidentally, this matter is related to the discussion of "psychical distance" in Edward Bulloch, Aesthetics. Lectures and Essays (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957), pp. 91-130.

⁸Cobb, p. 127.

subject and object; the subject neither tries to possess the object nor be possessed by it. Both subject and object remain themselves, with the former being open to the perfection of form of the latter. This definition of Cobb's, while pointing to some important features of eros, remains overly simple. Yet it provides a useful starting point.

From Cobb's discussion, a basic definition of eros may be offered. For my purposes here, eros is defined as love or appreciation for sensuous beauty, in relation to a person or object. This definition accords with what has been said so far. It can also appropriate the richness of May's discussion of eros. As eros is discussed below, this definition will be primary.

If there is a problem in the definition, it is in the term "beauty" and its meaning. "Beauty" may be treated briefly; this is based on Cobb's work which, in turn, is based on Whitehead. Cobb defines beauty as "a certain harmony of proportions and relations."⁹ It is a harmony contributed by the experiencing (perceiving) subject and independent of (yet, facilitated by) the objects experienced. Beauty is complex; it does not exist on a single scale with "discord" being at the opposite end. Rather, in addition to the degree of harmony is the strength or

⁹John B. Cobb, Jr., A Christian Natural Theology (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965), pp. 101-102.

force of beauty. Two aspects contribute to its strength: (1) its "massiveness," seen in terms of the breadth or complexity of elements which are brought into unity; and (2) its "intensity proper," meaning the comparative magnitude without reference to the qualitative variety.¹⁰ Beauty is the factor that constitutes value in the experience of a particular object by a subject.¹¹ If there is a single ideal of value beyond all others, it is the maximum strength of beauty. Cobb adds that beauty depends on the quite complex "harmonious balance of maximum massiveness and maximum intensity."¹² These statements should suffice in establishing a basic meaning for beauty; for elaboration, the reader is referred to Cobb's own work.¹³

Rollo May provides a fuller account of eros which may be based on Cobb's groundwork and on the primary definition posited here. May's work is thorough, as he believes eros has largely been repressed in our culture while sex has been elevated; and therefore, the recovery of eros in all its lost magnitude is vital. May returns to the Greek experience, to its early mythology and subsequent development, for the recovery of a full concept of eros. We may follow May's discussion initially and then summarize it. A few parenthetical notes from Tillich will be added here.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 103. ¹¹Ibid., p. 100. ¹²Ibid., p. 104.

¹³Ibid., Chapter 3, part 2.

The most basic feature in eros emerging out of May's review of Greek thought is that in eros there is a "state of being," in which one experiences the fullness of an event or moment with a person or object. In this state of being, in contrast to sex (which seeks gratification, termination, and release), eros seeks to prolong the feelings, to bask in the experience, to reach out and expand the experience.¹⁴ With this general feature, there is a whole network of related elements, all of which are parts of the heightened experience.

For the Greeks, according to May, there is a part of eros which can be understood as a power that attracts or invites a person's involvement. This is akin to Tillich's view that "love is the moving power of life."¹⁵ The power of eros invites one--lures one--to participate in higher levels of meanings, possibilities, and forms in the world, within the erotic encounter with the person or object. One is lured to the experience of love for beauty.

In such participation there is first a dimension of union. In Tillich's view, this is the overcoming of estrangement.¹⁶ May emphasizes that in eros there is a

¹⁴Rollo May, Love and Will (New York: Norton, 1969), p. 73.

¹⁵Paul Tillich, Love, Power, and Justice (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 12.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 25.

driving element towards union with the object. Yet, such union does not involve domination of the object by the subject. In union, concern is with the form or essence of that person or object rather than the person or object itself. This precludes the possibility of the subject's domination of the person or object. Further, such a possibility of imposition is alien to early Greek thought; such would be rather an instance of pride and thus an affront to eros and contrary to the Greek reverence for and delight in the beauty, form, and mystery of the objective world.¹⁷ Along with union in erotic love there is then at the same time a distancing, of which Cobb speaks. Both union and distancing are involved; and this may be understood, I suggest, in a polar relationship in which the strengthening of either one of the elements enriches the other within the experience of eros; distance enhances union and vice versa. This lends understanding to the Greeks' additional view that eros is "the source of tenderness,"¹⁸ as eros does not involve a subject's dominance of an object but rather its delight and passion in the object's essence.

In relation to the attracting power in eros and the dimension of union, eros is second of all spoken of as "the power that binds all things and all men together, the power informing all things."¹⁹ Here, inform "means to give

¹⁷May, p. 80. ¹⁸Ibid., p. 75. ¹⁹Ibid., p. 78.

inward form, to seek out by the devotion of love the unique form of the beloved person or object and to unite one's self with that form." Related here is Plato's view that eros contributes to man's creative spirit; in the erotic drive for union there is present the yearning for knowledge, meaning, pattern, wholeness, goodness, and truth--understood broadly as beauty. With this, man can create and generate new forms in which this knowledge and experience are manifest. In this process, man is spiritually sensitive; his imagination may play a key role. May wants to recover this creative, life-giving aspect of eros.²⁰ Also involved in this process of creating new forms is the destruction and erosion of old forms. Eros is thus seen in part as a creative force having a binding quality--binding man to (and informing him of) the world around him.

May discusses eros in relation to other areas, not of concern here. Emerging out of May's work is a complex concept of eros; this may be re-stated in a summary form. First, love as eros is a power existing both within and outside of man. It involves relationship between subject and object, as all loves do. There are several components of this relationship including, principally, both the elements of union and distancing between subject and object; there is a sense in which separation and estrangement are overcome as

²⁰Ibid., pp. 72-73.

well as a provision for the autonomy and integrity of both subject and object. In union with the beautiful essence, there is participation in new knowledge; this makes for a binding or informing dimension in the relationship. This participation is, in turn, linked to man's creative spirit vis-a-vis the world around him. Throughout the relationship are intense areas of emotional concern on the part of the subject for the intensification of the experience--which can be seen as a desire for wholeness within the experience of beauty. The entire experience may be spoken of as an experience of love for sensuous beauty in relation to a person or object. These summary points provide a useful yet narrow concept of erotic love. This conception will be broadened subsequently.

A brief parenthetical note may be appended here: it is Tillich's observation that there are really no pure types of love but rather "qualifications of love," "since the different qualities [of different kinds of love] are present, by efficiency or deficiency, in every act of love."²¹ With this in mind, we may proceed. Eros, though complex, is a vital element in human experience. Most basically, it means love or appreciation of sensuous beauty.

²¹Tillich, p. 5.

B. EROS AS ILLUMINATED IN THE FLAHERTY TRADITION

As stated earlier, one of May's theses is that in modern life erotic love has been regidly separated from sexual love and has been repressed while sexual love has been elevated. This phenomenon, he argues, has made for severe problems in personal existence. And recently, as pointed out, there has been renewed interest in the recovery of eros and things related to it (play, festivity, wonder) on the part of several theologians. With regard to this situation, one notable feature of the Flaherty tradition is the presence of erotic love. The manner in which eros is present in the Flahertys' work is the concern of this section.

To begin, it can be maintained both with a smile and in the context of this writing that the Flahertys made erotic films--probably the most erotic films in the history of the art. Eros is imbued both in the Flaherty process of film-making and in the contents of the films. Sadly, what we normally conceive as erotic films are those which screen nightly at the local Pussycat theatre; yet, these are not at all erotic but instead are coldly sexual. The Flaherty tradition embodies eros in the manner that the Greeks conceived it and as interpreted by May. And in so doing, they illuminate eros.

To see this, attention may be given initially to the Flaherty method of film-making, discussed in Chapter 1. One can begin with a reconsideration of the bases of the method in light of the definition of eros. Emerging first in this regard is the property of relationship between subject and object--the subject here being the Flahertys and the object being life, the world around them. Robert Flaherty seemingly strived for relationship with the life, movement, people, and objects which he came across. The sensuous and visual world was vital to him. This is apparent, for example, in Lord's account of traveling with Flaherty in America, quoted above, and is apparent also in the contents of the films, treated below. Flaherty's belief that in any subject there is at least one great film gives additional evidence of this attitude.

With this, as explained earlier, Flaherty brought to this relationship the attitudes of love and wonder for the object. Here, one begins to sense eros present in his work. When Mrs. Flaherty speaks of Flaherty's love for the Eskimo and the North country as "overflowing," this love may be spoken of most properly as eros. Undoubtedly in his experience with people, philia love (brotherly love) and agape love (self-giving love) were involved. Yet, in general, eros was predominant. There is the hint of the erotic drive for union in which, in wondrous encounter, Flaherty seeks to be bound to and informed by the beautiful

meaning or essence of that which he has encountered. His statement on the reason for returning to the North, "I go to come back," gives evidence of a strong desire to renew the experience of beauty which he has had before. He seeks a greater degree of wholeness. Relevant here are Mrs. Flaherty's words:

The teaching of the North was its immensity, its vast simplicity, its emptiness, unclutteredness, its clarity and purity, and its elemental strength, wind and snow endlessly carving new worlds of hazard and beauty--of a mysterious, mystical beauty.²²

And, of course, a broader concern of Flaherty's was "the search for the spirit of man." This search, also, was carried forth in love and wonder: a yearning to participate in the form and essence of the object. Other elements of eros, implicit here, become more apparent later on. One may note that in this love exemplified by Flaherty there is the absence of a dominating tendency on the part of the subject and thus a regard for distancing. In this primary area of the tradition, love as eros has begun to emerge.

Further insight comes as the Flaherty method is considered. Here, one can review the method as presented above. First, as discussed, the method derives from the fact that a camera has the ability to see. This ability is normally greater than that of the human eye and is regarded

²²Frances H. Flaherty, The Odyssey of a Film-Maker (Urbana, Ill: Beta Phi Mu, 1960), p. 12.

as intrinsically good. This attitude towards seeing makes eros possible. Seeing pervades the Flaherty method.

As the parts of the exploratory method are treated, eros becomes pronounced. Consider non-preconception, exploration, discovery, and revelation, as discussed earlier.

Non-preconception adds a neutral quality to seeing. With non-preconceived seeing, one does not impose his views on the subject, let alone exploit it. A distance is maintained (which parallels and reinforces the physical distance present in the motion picture theatre). At the same time, with the object allowed to be itself and free from the subject's imposition, the non-preconceiving subject may bask in the experiencing of the object. The experience is inclusive. With this, non-preconceived seeing is enhanced through the process of exploration by Flaherty's camera. The magnitude of the subject's experience increases with exploration. With this come the possibilities for discovery and revelation. Non-preconception and exploration facilitate eros. Discovery and revelation may be called fully erotic.

To explain, with non-preconception and exploration, subject and object are brought into relationship. Distance is maintained. Neither imposition nor exploitation are involved. Both subject and object are free. The opportunity exists for the subject to love--erotically--the object. Erotic union is possible with the beautiful

essence of the object; separation between the two may be overcome, while the autonomy and integrity of both are maintained. All of this may be involved, and usually is, as the Flaherty camera films its object, and the viewer (in turn) watches the projected film. The camera films the object, experiences it, and explores it--even basks in and celebrates the wondrous encounter with the object. There are indications of a desire to intensify and prolong the experience. The camera stays with the object--watching, seeing--while as much as an entire reel of film passes behind its lens. With camera reloaded, Flaherty returns to shoot the object again and again. The seal hunt in Nanook is a prime example here as is the "study footage" of Louisiana Story. The object is explored with the camera as thoroughly as possible. With Flaherty's use of camera movement and framing (see Chapter 1), the exploration is enhanced. The subject--the camera or the viewer--is (in the case of the camera, or, may be in the case of the viewer) sensitive to the experience of the object. For the viewer this may be seen as emotional and spiritual sensitivity, (in contrast to the objective sensitivity of the camera). Something of a creative and life-giving nature may be experienced. In terms of the Greek sense of eros, the subject may feel both something of an outward pull to participate further in the relationship as well as an internal desire to do the same. Here, one may note the

presence of an erotic drive toward union in which separation is overcome. Clearly, with the first two areas of the Flaherty method, eros love has begun.

Eros becomes more full as discovery occurs. At some point in the filming--in one shot or montage out of many--there comes a discovery. Earlier, Iris Barry was quoted as saying that discovery involves "a sensation of delight in seeing something with new depth and penetration . . ."²³ This accords with the Flahertys' work. Also, for the Flahertys, as noted, discovery involves new insight into a thing's inner spirit. Further, there is a self-transforming dimension in discovery. As a subject's relationship to an object and its essence becomes a binding union, the subject is open and sensitive to being informed by that object and its inner spirit and, in so doing, is transformed. The informing quality of eros is present as is the experience of a creative, life-giving dimension. One seeks to prolong the union. All of this may be the result of a single shot or the usually longer montage of shots. Discovery as embodied in the Flaherty tradition is thus clearly erotic.

With revelation, eros is heightened more. The intensity of the perception increases as do the feelings of delight and reverence--the overwhelming sense of loveliness.

²³Ibid., p. 41.

The experience of unity and oneness with the object becomes profound. The informing element continues, at a new plateau; beauty and truth are experienced as never before. All of this is part of what the Flahertys call revelation. The fully erotic character of this is clear. Revelation was allowed to happen naturally in the production process; mystery was occasionally involved with this, as Mrs. Flaherty comments, regarding the making of Aran:

Three times we shot the land sequence, shot the whole sequence through on three different locations. . . . This time--what it was I don't know, whether it was the light that day, or the location, whether it was the way the figures moved, their relations to each other and to the land--or something else--whatever it was, it was a mystery, there was nothing we could explain about it, but at last it was there, we had it, the camera had found it.

Often we would come back from a day's shooting, happy and excited, sure that we had shot some wonderful stuff. Perhaps, as we neared home Bob would take a pot shot at something, anything at all, just to use up the tag-end of film in his camera. Like as not the stuff we had thought would be so wonderful turned out to be nothing at all, while the pot shot, so casually taken, would turn out to be a revelation.²⁴

The nature of revelation becomes more clear as the contents of the films are reviewed below. Overall, for the Flahertys, like the Greeks, eros and revelation occur in essentially visual terms.

There is a final erotic element in the Flaherty tradition: with eros, one's own creative drive is initiated. It may be said that Flaherty used the motion

²⁴Ibid., p. 30.

picture camera in order to translate his experience of eros onto film. At the same time, his desire to create and reveal derives from eros and may be called erotic. On this, Mrs. Flaherty writes:

The power of our great machines to transform the world Robert Flaherty saw as an extension of our own spirit. The importance of the new machine, the motion picture camera, was its power to change that spirit, to transform us in ourselves.²⁵

This is the creative drive resulting from eros. The Flahertys' art was erotic, as was its motivation.

Before considering the contents of the films, an elaboration may be offered. To do justice to the Flaherty tradition in this area, I include here a few statements taken mainly from Mrs. Flaherty's writings. These poetic words describe well the presence of eros in their work.

Mrs. Flaherty writes:

[The Flaherty films] are timeless in the sense that they do not argue, they celebrate. And, what they celebrate, freely and spontaneously, is the thing itself for its own sake.²⁶

Again, she writes of a "participation mystique" in the encounter with the films:

Here is the "way" of the camera, of this machine: through its sensitivity to movement it can take us into a new dimension of seeing, through the mysterious rhythmic impulses of life and love take us inward into the spirit, into the unity of the spirit.²⁷ [my emphasis]

²⁵Ibid., p. 10. ²⁶Ibid., p. 11. ²⁷Ibid., p. 40.

And, she writes that the Flaherty way is:

The way of discovering or releasing, with its discipline of letting be. . . the exploratory way--for a natural poetry, for a greater awareness of the essential truth of things as they are, a deeper communion with all being.²⁸ /my emphasis/

And:

The passing moment becomes the fullness of life and its fulfillment--becomes, as on the motion picture screen, the moment of truth.²⁹

Penelope Houston writes:

For Flaherty, the film is first and foremost a means of communication existing to show us things we have never seen, or things which we know as we have never been able to see them.³⁰

Finally, Jean Renoir writes on the transformation involved in the Flahertys' work:

Flaherty showed the pure thing. One leaves the theatre feeling better. Bob lifted the level of the public.³¹

Eros in the Flaherty tradition becomes clearer in the contents of the films. As said, the films in part represent a search for the spirit of man coming to terms with his environment. This was basically a visual search. Spoken and written words, which tend to limit experience, played only a small role in the films. The films overcome

²⁸Ibid., p. 42. ²⁹Ibid., p. 5.

³⁰Penelope Houston, "Interview with Robert Flaherty" Sight and Sound, (London) LXXI (1949).

³¹Jean Renoir, quoted in British Broadcasting Corporation, "Portrait of Robert Flaherty," Tape Cassette. School of Theology Library.

words--transcend them. They deal with reality in more inclusive and free visual terms.³² Relevant to this is Canudo's comment that for Flaherty "the lens has replaced the poetic mind."³³ This visual element facilitates and enhances eros in the films' contents.

From the Flahertys' first work on, eros is present. In Nanook, the viewer encounters an Eskimo family and its way of life. As Mrs. Flaherty would say of these people, as of all the people in the Flaherty films, they are ordinary people doing the ordinary things of their everyday life. One unique thing about the film is the presence of eros. The viewer is pulled into an erotic relationship with the film's contents; he may experience an inward drive of eros love for these people and their situation and in so doing be transformed. As one watches the film--as if seeing a film for the first time, without imposing preconceptions on its contents--he may share in the experience of eros. There is one scene in which this is vividly so, described by Mrs. Flaherty:

When Nanook and Nyla and little Allegoo smile out at us from the screen, so simple, so genuine and true, we, too, become simple, genuine, true. They are

³²Frances H. Flaherty, Speech at the National Film Theatre (London, October 26, 1958). Tape Cassette. School of Theology Library.

³³Riccioto Canudo, "Another View of Nanook" in Lewis Jacobs (ed.), The Documentary Tradition from Nanook to Woodstock (New York: Hopkinson and Blake, 1971), p. 20.

themselves; we, in turn, become ourselves. Everything that might separate us from these people falls away. In spite of all of our differences, . . . we are one with these people. And the feeling of oneness can deepen and become a feeling of oneness with all people and all things. It can become the profound and profoundly liberating experience we call "participation mystique." But--and this is the point--let one false gesture, one least unnatural movement, the slightest hint of artificiality appear, and separation comes back. Again we are just looking at the people on the screen, and the whole experience of identity, of oneness, of participation, becomes impossible, could not happen, could never be. The secret of Nanook is, I believe, in those two words, "being themselves." Not acting, but being.³⁴

Herein is a primary achievement of the Flaherty films. In them, and in this quotation, most of the elements of eros are present, including: the integrity of both subject and object, the possibility for union and being informed in the relationship, the overcoming of separation, the yearning for the prolongation of the relationship. With this, one comes to a better understanding of eros itself.

In Moana, again, the same process is present. The film, of a different subject was made in the same manner. The subject was the everyday life of the dying Polynesian culture. As the film was being shot, it would be projected in bits and segments for the Samoan people. They would judge the film's truth in recapturing parts of the old culture. Mrs. Flaherty writes of what the camera captured:³⁵

Life expressed in motion, ritual gestures, beautiful movements "worn smooth by time"--movements too fine

³⁴Flaherty, Odyssey..., pp. 17-18. ³⁵Ibid., p. 21.

for the eye to see, but that the camera could catch, and catching them, could capture the very spirit of these people.

Moana achieves a "truth and intimacy"³⁶ which may be partly understood as erotic. Related to this, Mrs. Flaherty's first experience of "seeing," quoted in Chapter 1, may be cited here as being erotic, too--the experience of letting one's thoughts fall away, being opened to being informed by the larger world around, selflessly participating in it, basking in it.

Eros pervades the Flahertys' work, even in so small a work as a short film made in 1925 on the potter. On this, Mrs. Flaherty writes:

Take, for instance, the hands of the potter as he molds the clay. The motion picture camera can follow these movements closely, intimately, so intimately that as with our eyes we follow, we come to feel those movements as a sensation in ourselves. Momentarily we touch and know the very heart and mind of the potter; we partake, as it were, of his life, we are one with him.³⁷

Eros is similarly present in the other films. Indeed, the Flahertys seemed to experience the subjects of their films in the same manner in which they filmed them. Mrs. Flaherty writes lovingly of the Aran Islands--of the never-ending "delight," for example, of sitting on the wharf edge and peering into the clear depths of the water³⁸

³⁶Ibid., p. 22. ³⁷Ibid., p. 39. ³⁸Ibid., p. 25.

and, similarly, of the land, the cliffs, the ocean.³⁹ In the preparations for Louisiana Story, she speaks of her and Flaherty's fascination with different parts of the oil industry. There was a "mystery" present in the experience --an "unseen magic"--which they opened themselves to and tried to "translate into film."⁴⁰ This experience may be understood largely as eros love. In the opening sequence of Louisiana Story, as the camera with the boy explores its way through the swamp, open to all things, letting what will come in, experiencing the beauty of that world--the water, the flowers, the snake, the aligator, the moss, the light on the moss and water, the movement present everywhere--one has a feeling of peace and oneness. Even, later on, during the oil drilling sequence, one may watch and participate with no thought of his own in the ultimately mysterious process which the camera reveals.

Overall, in the films and their contents as well as in the experience of viewing the films, several elements of eros are present. As a result, eros is better understood. From May's perspective, the Flaherty tradition fully recovers eros. The problem now emerging is how to deal with the fact of its recovery and, specifically, how to deal with it in Christian terms. What is significant to this point is that in this body of work, eros is manifest.

³⁹Ibid., p. 31.

⁴⁰Ibid., pp. 35-36.

C. EROS IN A RELIGIOUS CONTEXT

One of the notable developments in theology in the last few years, subsequent to the emphases on the death of God thought, has been a renewed concern with formulating an approach to reality in terms of (for want of a better word) beauty. Harvey Cox,⁴¹ Sam Keen,⁴² William Dean,⁴³ and David L. Miller⁴⁴ have all contributed to this new discussion.

These books share a common starting point for their analyses. It is a starting point related to one of May's theses: namely, in present society eros has been repressed and negated while sex with its various manipulative and mechanical dimensions has been elevated. Each theologian states the problem in slightly different terms, yet their concern is the same. Cox,⁴⁵ for example, understands the problem as involving a withering of man's capacity for celebration, fantasy, and festivity. This is due to the

⁴¹Harvey Cox, Feast of Fools (New York: Harper & Row, 1969).

⁴²Sam Keen, Apology for Wonder (New York: Harper & Row, 1969) and Sam Keen, To a Dancing God (New York: Harper & Row, 1970).

⁴³William D. Dean, Coming To, A Theology of Beauty (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972).

⁴⁴David L. Miller, Gods and Games: Toward a Theology of Play (New York: World, 1969).

⁴⁵Cox, "Introduction."

thrust of recent history which is oriented towards working within a narrow sense of history in which life and thought are more technological, manipulated, rational, and ordinary. As a resolution to this, Cox advocates a new emphasis on man's capacity to engage in fantasy and to be festive. With this, Cox writes, man will be opened to a more meaningful and "larger cosmic circle";⁴⁶ man can experience a greater wholeness in his encounter with the world. Keen, as another example, writes similarly. He speaks of two types of man:⁴⁷ homo faber (manipulating man) and homo admirans (wondering man). For him, the problem of contemporary life is in the nullification of homo admirans--this, due in part to the triumph of technical and calculating reason in human experience over the more receptive and inclusive ontological reason of homo admirans as exemplified in the earlier more traditional, pre-modern, or primitive man. The problem: modern man's (homo faber's) capacity for wonder has been lost. The attitudes of receptivity and openness to the surrounding world are lost, along with this. Homo faber can celebrate only what he himself has created; much of the possible experience available to man today has been excluded. Keen's solution to the problem lies with the emergence of homo tempestivus

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 28.

⁴⁷Keen, Apology..., Chapters 3-5.

(timely man), who at different and appropriate times can manifest what is best of both homo faber and homo admirans.⁴⁸ Keen seeks the recovery of man's capacity for wonder, which is to be responded to with dance. His motives and purposes are akin to those of Cox. Each seeks to transcend present, limited, problematic existence.

With regard both to this recent theological discussion and to this dissertation, two points are notable. First, that which these men are seeking to recover (fantasy, wonder, and so on) is remarkably similar--and in some areas identical--to eros. Second, by virtue of this, the notion of eros may be broadened so as to include some important religious dimensions, most of these being implicit in the above discussion.

On the first point, it is evident that Cox's call for a new emphasis on the experience of fantasy or Keen's call for a new emphasis on wonder relate closely to the experience of eros as discussed thus far; in some ways the experience of wonder or fantasy may be called erotic. The call for eros and the call for fantasy or wonder are both a partial reaction to the same problem: namely, each seeks to transcend the experience characterized by technique, manipulation, rationality, mechanization, and utility. Both seek an experience which is intrinsically good--an

⁴⁸Ibid., Chapter 6.

activity which can be engaged in simply because it is good in itself. Each has a dimension of immediacy. The experiencing subject in the situation of eros or wonder is receptive, open, and emotionally sensitive. A dimension of disinterest on the subject's part is present, spoken of above in terms of distancing and non-preconception; the subject is in part passive as he does not impose himself on the object being wondrously or erotically encountered. Suspension of one's own ordinary thought may play a role. The sensual world is allowed to be itself. Also involved in the experiences of eros and wonder or fantasy may be the gaining of new knowledge on the part of the subject. As with eros, there may be in wonder the desires to prolong and heighten the experience; the experience of fascination does not require immediate satisfaction--on the contrary, the experience may continue in the form of festivity or celebration. In Sam Keen's virtual small treatise on wonder,⁴⁹ among the qualities of wonder that he lists are feelings of surprise, puzzlement, ambivalence, intimacy, and admiration; all of these may be found in the experience of eros. There is, overall, a great area of compatibility and identification between the experiences of eros and

⁴⁹Ibid., Chapters 1-2, especially.

wonder or fantasy.⁵⁰

A notable feature of the work of Cox, Keen, and the others (now regarding the second main point) is that their accounts of fantasy, wonder, beauty, and so on explicitly incorporate some important religious dimensions. In contrast, while May's account of eros has some implicit religious dimensions, his concern is more with the recovery of a narrow sense of eros without the fully religious aspect--a natural part of eros--being emphasized nor even discussed. By virtue of this recent theological discussion, it is now easier to identify the religious areas of eros and with this, then, to highlight eros as a religious concern.

The work of these theologians also has common religious characteristics. Usually, in the experiences of wonder, fantasy, festivity--as in eros, as mentioned above, though not emphasized--is the presence of spiritual sensitivity on the part of the subject to that which he encounters. By this, I mean that the subject may be open to important religious--cosmic--meanings and questions. There

⁵⁰It is interesting to note that even in Keen's writings there is some confusion on the nature of the relationship between eros and wonder. In Apology..., p. 15, eros is included within the experience of wonder; in To A Dancing God, p. 59, wonder is spoken of as a pre-requisite to eros. This, of course, is not crucial to the thrust of Keen's work; yet it does indicate some lack of precision, on the whole.

may indeed be some experience of mystery in each. Of further importance, involved in each is the movement towards the overcoming of alienation and separation--and the movement into the subject's feeling of a union of some sort between himself and the object. The nature of this union has been described above. A greater degree of wholeness is felt. (This is of some importance in Keen.⁵¹) Most important, with union, and going beyond it, is the experience in the wondrous or erotic encounter of a larger sense of reality--that is, an openness to and perception of a "larger cosmic circle,"⁵² a larger and more inclusive view of the harmonious world with which the experiencing subject feels himself to be one. Miller's words are relevant here:

The story [of our experience] is about a movement of an idea out of an originally religious unified configuration, proceeding through a period of fragmentation, individuation, and breakdown, and ending with a rediscovery of an original harmony which had never been forgotten or lost in some forms of Eastern religious wisdom.⁵³

This religious experience of union, with the various feelings involved, is found also in erotic experience.

Illustrating this, and in terms of eros as exemplified in the work of the Flahertys, are Mrs. Flaherty's

⁵¹Keen, Apology..., p. 25.

⁵²Cox, p. 28.

⁵³Miller, p. 116.

words, (quoted above yet worth repeating here):

[The Flaherty way is. . .] the way of discovering or releasing, with its discipline of letting be. . . the exploratory way--for a natural poetry, for a greater awareness of the essential truth of things as they are, a deeper communion with all being.⁵⁴

Especially relevant, too, is Mrs. Flaherty's statement on Nanook (quoted on pp. 62-63) in which she speaks of the overcoming of separation in the experience of beauty and truth as well as the experience of a profound sense of oneness and communion with all people and things.

The explicitly religious character of eros may now be fully emphasized. The experience of eros has important religious dimensions, to which the related work of the contemporary theologians treated here gives insight.

Still, at this point, while some awareness has been gained of the religious component of eros, the manner in which eros is precisely religious has not been indicated clearly. To carry forth on this task requires some work, part of which is beyond the scope of this paper. Dean, working out of a Whiteheadian perspective, has dealt critically with the work of Cox, Keen, Miller and others and has brought the thrust of their work into a theologically systematic framework. He formulates what he terms the "aesthetic mode of existence" and relates it to many major concerns of traditional metaphysics. While Dean's work is

⁵⁴Flaherty, Odyssey..., p. 42.

not of immediate concern here, he has developed one good approach for treating eros in its full (including religious) character, within his "theology of beauty." Another approach to this task--the one I have taken here--is to work in a more anthropological manner towards the inclusion of eros in its full sense within what may be called the structure of Christian existence. If, indeed, the Flahertys have recovered something vital to human life--namely, eros--then the problem emerges as to how to deal with this in Christian terms. It is to this task that I now turn.

D. EROS IN CHRISTIAN EXISTENCE: AN AFFIRMATION

The focus of this section narrows considerably. My immediate purposes are twofold, being: (1) to affirm eros as being required for inclusion in the structure of Christian existence, and (2) to work out the general character of this inclusion. My broad purpose is to provide a framework in which we can deal affirmatively with the recovery of eros in Christian terms, especially as eros is illuminated by the Flaherty tradition.

For this task, I will be using chiefly the work of Cobb and Daniel Day Williams.⁵⁵ Their books move in (what I

⁵⁵Cobb, The Structure of Christian Existence, and Daniel Day Williams, The Spirit and Forms of Love (New York: Harper & Row, 1968).

called above) a more anthropological manner towards the inclusion of eros in Christianity. Much of what follows will be a synthesis of the thought of these two men in this area. A main concern will be with the two conflicting structures of Christian existence proposed by Cobb and Williams, as these relate to the role of eros.

This discussion involves the following points, parts of which require simple re-statements of positions. First, it will be shown that Williams provides a useful definition of eros (harmonizing with yet going beyond May's into the more religious realm); and, as well, Williams provides sufficient justification for the inclusion of eros in Christian life. Second, Cobb's insightful critique of Williams's basic "structure" of Christian existence will be recounted. Third, Cobb's scheme for the structure of Christian existence will be set forth and the shortcomings of his formulation will be indicated. And fourth, I hope to press critically and open up Cobb's structure and show how his structure may accommodate much of Williams's thought on the role of eros in Christianity. Overall, I want to affirm eros as being vital in Christian existence, especially as such existence is schematized by Cobb. In the final section, I will consider how this Christian affirmation of eros accords with the related work of the Flahertys.

a. Williams affirms the inclusion of eros in Christian existence from the outset of his book; he presents wide-ranging discussions supporting this, subsequently. I first want to list here some of Williams's definitive elements of eros and then note the areas providing support for eros in Christian terms. Williams's concept of Christian existence is treated in the following section. What immediately follows is narrowly concerned with that part of Williams's discussion of eros which is relatively independent of his own structure of Christian existence. Here, I want to establish a limited notion of eros (related to the earlier work of this chapter) which, later, may be expanded and subordinated to Cobb's concept of Christian existence.

Williams speaks of eros throughout his book. The minimal definition of it, complementing May's work, emerges as follows. Eros is defined early as love of the beautiful in relation to a person or object.⁵⁶ As one of the human loves, it is not static but "works within the history of the self's becoming."⁵⁷ Relevant to this, Williams later writes, is that "To love is to act. . . and loving involves feelings, emotions, cravings, valuations, and sharing. . ."⁵⁸ "The human loves" are defined as "all our

⁵⁶Williams, p. 2.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 13.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 117.

experiences of organic feelings and sympathetic attachments for things and persons in the world."⁵⁹ Human loves, including eros, are incomplete: they cannot provide ultimate fulfillment. Eros, he says, needs the redirection of God's agape. With this, he asserts his thesis that eros and the other human loves "have two aspects which make them a preparation for agape." He writes:

They [the human loves] have the power to open up the self and thus to begin to show the requirement of self-giving. Second, they reach the limits of self-fulfillment, and thus prepare for acknowledgement that only a love which transcends the human loves can fulfil the self.⁶⁰

[A parenthetic elaboration:] Aesthetic eros requires a man to live beyond self-gratification.⁶¹

With this, the relation between human love and the gaining of knowledge is later stressed as important in this context. Emotions, as well, which may be a part of love, contribute to self-discovery and knowledge.

Eros, for Williams, is a human love which is not static but is in process, is in itself incomplete, involves feelings and emotions, is fundamentally related to the development of knowledge, and is seen as helping to prepare for God's agape. It is eros, conceived by Williams in this way and complementing the earlier formulation of eros, which I want to affirm and discuss in the context of Christian existence.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 205. ⁶⁰Ibid., p. 204. ⁶¹Ibid., p. 208.

Williams examines several areas in his book which provide support for the inclusion of eros in Christian existence. As it is not my purpose to argue for this--but, rather, to affirm eros in an adequate and clarified structure of Christian existence--I will simply note here some of the areas of support. Most of these are mentioned in the introductory chapter. Williams writes:

The Bible affirms the goodness of man's created life. Man bears the image of God in his responsible existence. Every human love shapes man's life before God. The Bible never leaves the human loves independent of their origin in God and their service to him. Hence, the great ethical question is how the human loves serve God. It is a question of the true ordering of life in the light of the Kingdom. Nothing which belongs to man's need and vitality as man is rejected or disparaged. "Our heavenly Father knoweth you have need of these things," Jesus says concerning the goods of this world.⁶²

These statements are expounded upon in the later chapters on love in the Old and New Testaments and in the others. And, Williams finds further support for the significance of human loves as he affirms Whiteheadian metaphysics in his critique of Augustine.

b. Eros takes on further dimensions in the context of Williams's structure of Christian existence. Yet, the structure itself is problematic; and there are problems with the resulting, more broadly conceived sense of eros. Williams's structure of Christian existence follows, along

⁶²Ibid., p. 5.

with the chief points of Cobb's criticism. Following this, the inadequacy of the full sense of eros as developed by Williams will be indicated.

A particular understanding of love is vital to the whole of Williams's work. Love is understood as "that expression of spirit which has communion in freedom as its goal."⁶³ The essence of man, for Williams, is his loves. And, the essence of human (as well as divine) love is the will to community. He writes:

Love is what God's spirit is in his action in history, as he deals with human loves and lovelessness, and opens the way to a new community of life whose spirit is informed by love.⁶⁴

Divine love is agape, and it is distinguished from all human loves in the overall thrust toward communion; involved overall is a process of growth.

Significant in the area of human loves and existence is Williams's treatment of self-sacrifice. Against those traditional modes of self-sacrifice which lead to otherworldliness, self-deception, repression, or compromise, Williams argues that there is "a union of sacrificial love with the self's growth into its full stature, which can be realized, though certainly only through grace."⁶⁵ Supporting this thesis are those particular aspects of human existence, described by Williams in his chapter "God and

⁶³Ibid., p. 3. ⁶⁴Ibid., p. 11. ⁶⁵Ibid., p. 203.

Man":

. . . to be is to respond. We have seen that passivity to the other, setting the other free, and the will to have one's own existence shaped by the other as well as to give oneself creatively constitutes one of the categorical conditions of love. If then life in communion is the essential nature of man, this includes transformation by participation with the other. . .

Both self-affirmation and self-giving are aspects of the essential love which is the will to communion. Self-affirmation without response is deadly. . . Self-giving without self-affirmation is meaningless.⁶⁶

Williams develops further support for his thesis as he considers the one appropriate object of human love: agape. He writes that agape "is the spirit in which the self can give itself away and yet be fulfilled."⁶⁷ Cobb summarizes Williams's position at this point as follows:

In giving up the self the self finds itself and that which it finds contains all the human loves preserved as well as transformed. Self-sacrifice is subsumed under what others have called the theme of dying of the old self and rising to the new. Williams interprets this as the pattern of creativity or growth. By sacrificing every created good to the creative good one participates in greater created goods.⁶⁸

Summarily, then, Williams's structure of Christian existence involves these important elements: an affirmation of human loves, understood as will to community, which help to prepare the self for agape; an active relationship with the object of human love, God's agape; a participatory manner of living with others; and, most importantly, a transformed

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 136.

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 210.

⁶⁸John B. Cobb, Jr., "A Process Systematic Theology," Journal of Religion, L.2 (April 1970), 202-203.

sense of self-sacrifice which is intimately united with the self's growth.

While Cobb, in critique, affirms much of Williams's thought, he raises objections to the account of self-sacrifice. Cobb's concern is with the matter of the self and the other. Despite the thrust towards--and Williams's affirmation of--community, Cobb recognizes the present existence of a profound tension between the self and the other; "there are times when a man is called to lay down his life for his friend," he notes. Cobb criticizes Williams's lack of concern for this matter of the self's good as distinguished from the other person's good; and he proceeds to emphasize it. Cobb adheres to the distinction between "actualizing ourselves with reference to our own fulfillment and with reference to that of others." And, taking Sartre's position on the impossibility of love very seriously, he writes:

If I desire community with the other person only to heal the aching void in my own life, there will be no real community--only my attempt to exploit him. Unless I can be genuinely concerned that my neighbor too experience community, I am lost.⁶⁹

He goes on to note the difficulty of this task and affirms the thought of Luther here, on sin and grace. Cobb denies the inevitability of otherworldliness, repression and so on, connected with self-sacrifice. Further, Cobb affirms

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 203.

Reinhold Niebuhr's analysis of the tension between--and thus the potential for sin arising from--one's natural self-centeredness and one's "imaginative apprehension of a more disinterested perspective"; this is an area which Williams has skirted in his effort to affirm his thought on self-sacrifice. Finally, against Williams, Cobb attacks a seemingly Pharisaic tendency in Williams, writing that "Since [for Williams] 'love' names the total movement of the human soul, we cannot distinguish between acts performed from love and those performed from a sense of duty."⁷⁰ Implicit here is a lack of concern on Williams's part with human motives as well.

Overall, if one accepts the validity of Cobb's critique, Williams's structure of Christian existence is inadequate, especially in the account of self-sacrifice.

Finally, here, eros is to be distinguished as it relates to Williams's structure of Christian existence and as it is affected by Cobb's critique. First, as stated, I want to affirm Williams's characteristics of eros established earlier and note that these remain unaffected by Williams's structure of existence. With regard to a more full sense of eros, to which Williams would adhere in his structure of existence, some problems arise.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 204.

The most significant of these relates to the binding linkage that ensues between eros and Williams's analysis of self-sacrifice. In conjunction with Cobb's critique of Williams's "self-sacrifice" it is evident that eros (as a manifestation of a human will to community) is tied exclusively to one's own self-interest and fulfillment--granted, of course, as eros is fulfilled by God's agape. Eros, as it relates to the good of the other cannot be accommodated in Williams's scheme since, as shown by Cobb, Williams deals inadequately with the distinction between the self and the other, and the potential for sin therein.

Williams's concern with the self seems to require a sense of eros tied to self-fulfillment. Precluded in his analysis is an eros which may co-exist with and even facilitate a genuine concern for the other. Further, the potential in one's support of eros for contributing to the other's good tends to be precluded in Williams's analysis.

One dimension of the fuller sense of eros may be affirmed, however. This concerns Williams's identification of eros (and the other human loves) as the "will to community." This may be affirmed--though the self-reference which Williams establishes should be toned down or denied and (as will be elaborated below) the reference to the other should be affirmed. To repeat a statement of Cobb:⁷¹

⁷¹Ibid., p. 203.

"Unless I can be genuinely concerned that my neighbor too experience community, I am lost." Nevertheless, eros defined in part as "will to community" should be included along with its characteristics established earlier.

c. The structure of Christian existence, as conceived by Cobb, is superior to that of Williams. Here, I will first indicate how this is so. Yet, Cobb's structure seems unnecessarily limited in the area of what is not included within it. Secondly, then, I want to indicate these not unalterable limitations in the structure.

For Cobb, Christian existence is defined as "spiritual existence which expresses itself in love."⁷² The essence of this is summarized by Cobb as follows:

Here, we must think of a reflective consciousness in which the seat of existence is capable of changing. Furthermore, we must think of this changing center as itself responsible for changing, and thus transcendent of the locus from which it organizes the whole. Finally, we must conceive this transcendent center as capable of retaining its transcendent identity, and of refusing to identify itself, with any other aspect of the psyche.

. . . The essential demand of God has to do precisely with those dimensions of selfhood [i.e., the occurrence of particular emotions, the limits of its own capacity, and itself as it is given to itself] which the personal "I" [of Prophetic existence exemplified in the Old Testament] cannot control. To accept those demands and to accept responsibility to live in terms of them is to accept radical responsibility for oneself, and that is, at the same time to transcend one's self. That means that the new spiritual "I" is responsible both for what it is and for what it is not, both for what lies in its power and for what lies

⁷²Cobb, Structure..., p. 125.

beyond its power. For the spiritual "I" need not remain itself but can, instead, always transcend itself.⁷³

It is apparent that Cobb's structure is further developed than that of Williams. This is especially so in the area of motives. The "radical priority" in the inner state, inner intention, is strongly affirmed by Cobb. The inner state of a person does not have this same priority in Williams. As Cobb indicates, for Williams, actions performed from a sense of duty cannot be distinguished from those performed out of love. This feature is one which for Cobb differentiates Prophetic and Christian existence; motives do not have the same priority in Prophetic existence as in Christian existence.

All of this, in turn, closely relates to Cobb's account of love. The love that fulfills spiritual existence is described in terms of "a love that uniquely transcends self-centeredness in a genuine concern for the other, untained by concern for its consequences for the lover."⁷⁴ The profound distinction between self and other in the contest of love is thus vital to spiritual existence; as seen above, this distinction is largely ignored by Williams. Cobb goes on to clarify and summarize the role of love in spiritual existence as follows:⁷⁵

⁷³Ibid., pp. 123-124.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 135. ⁷⁵Ibid., p. 136.

[For the Christian, love] . . . is made possible by the gift of an undeserved love, and hence it cannot seek a deserving object for its expression. The possibility of its occurrence consists in a freedom from the sickness of self-preoccupation and, hence, the prior relation to the self cannot be relevant.

In Christian love, we are free from bondage to ourselves without ceasing to be the self-transcending selves of spiritual existence. Lover and loved retain their full personal, responsible autonomy.

And, thus, Cobb's structure of spiritual existence, fulfilled in love so as to constitute Christian existence, is seen overall as being basically complete, distinct, and more advanced than Williams's structure.

Yet, despite its basic completeness, Cobb's treatment of Christian existence is limited. The structure of existence is truncated in so far as Cobb fails to consider the relevance of the many other forms of human love, including eros, which he discusses, to Christian love and existence itself. For example, Cobb distinguishes and describes four types of love--understood qualifiedly as "positive valuation of an object"--relevant to the Greek experience yet does not consider their relevance to Christian existence. What results is an affirmation of Christian love (defined partly in terms of genuine concern for the other) without an account of some of the manners and contexts in which one Christianly loves another. The manner in which an object of beauty relates to Christian love is not accounted for by Cobb.

d. Therefore, in this section, I want to press critically and open up Cobb's own structure and indicate how his structure may accommodate a good portion of Williams's thought on the role of eros in Christianity.

I initially want to affirm Christian existence as developed by Cobb. Beyond this, certain views of Williams, coming out of a Whiteheadian perspective, are in harmony with Cobb's thought. Important among these is the view that the self is a becoming entity, as opposed to a static or fixed entity. For Williams, the essential relatedness of all loves, human and divine, depends on this view.⁷⁶

Early in his book, Williams writes:

. . . one clue to the relation of the divine and the human loves. . . is that all the loves work within the history of the self's becoming. No love. . . is . . . static. . . . It is a spirit at work in life and taking form in the process of becoming.⁷⁷

With this, Williams affirms that all man's loves "in sex, family, nation, work and art participate in the working of a reality which lends final significance to his broken efforts and which in forgiveness and mercy can restore his shattered spirit."⁷⁸ All of this is in harmony with Cobb.

Before elaborating I would like to reaffirm Williams's notion of eros as discussed above. There, eros was seen as a human love in process, incomplete, involving

⁷⁶Williams, p. 204.

⁷⁷Ibid., pp. 12-13.

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 14.

feelings and emotions, being related by virtue of its creative aspect to many areas of knowledge, and as being important in helping prepare the way for God's agape. Later eros as being "will to community" was affirmed.

In reviewing the nature of Christian existence it is apparent that the spiritual and radically self-transcendent "I" which Cobb describes must participate in the things of this world. This naturally includes human love, and eros. The spiritual "I" may participate in these loves while not affecting its radically self-transcendent nature. And, it is appropriate to suggest that the "I" may do so from the perspective of love which Cobb ultimately describes. The "I" seems able to affirm an eros love--with all that is entailed--and do so with an attitude of genuine concern for the other, regardless of the self.

At this point, it is unnecessary to re-state the concept of eros as it has been developed. In its full sense, it is multifaceted. A few summary points may be made, however. In the Flaherty tradition, eros is manifest. A subject may be brought into an erotic encounter with the object. An intrinsically valuable experience ensues. A kind of distance prevents any possibility of exploitation or dominance. Ordinary and preconceived thought may be suspended as remarkable new knowledge and insight are gained. One experiences the overcoming of separation and estrangement. A feeling of union with the essence or form

of the object may be experienced. This feeling may deepen and become a feeling of oneness or harmony with the larger surrounding world. Other feelings may be present: of wonder, amazement, desire to prolong the experience, pleasure, and so on. Emotional and spiritual sensitivity on the part of the subject is vital. In the work of the Flahertys, all of these elements are found. From the perspective of Christian existence, as discussed by Cobb and Williams, the possibility of appropriating eros fully is feasible.

This ability of the spiritual "I" to affirm eros may be seen as similar to the manner in which (Cobb, I think, would affirm) one wills to community: not for one's own self-fulfillment but instead having the primacy of genuine concern for the other in mind. A love for that which is beautiful and is to be experienced erotically, like community, may be affirmed for the good which ensues for the other. The Flahertys' manner of creating art exemplifies this. With this, it is evident that in affirming eros, agape love may be facilitated (at least among human kind) both as a result of the act itself and by virtue of the nature of eros. It is interesting to note that Cobb's description of aesthetic love involves a distancing of subject from object, which I have affirmed from the start and which is relevant here. The spiritual "I" in his genuine concern for another may erotically encounter an object, having a natural distance from himself; this would be

important with regard to the good of the other, as no exploitation of the object would be involved in the encounter, knowledge would be gained, and the growth of the larger community would be facilitated.

Thus, a role for eros within Christian existence seems capable of being affirmed. I have intended here to indicate how this may be conceived. The work of the Flahertys in recovering eros--this, corresponding to the call for such recovery by May, Cox, Keen, and the others--thus becomes significant, as now eros can contribute creatively to and be appropriated in Christian life.

E. CONCLUSION/SUMMARY

One can now re-state the major thesis of this chapter: Eros, as a religious concern, is illuminated profoundly in the Flaherty tradition. Altogether, in support of this, the following areas have been covered. First, a narrow definition, having no explicit religious dimension, was presented. This was based on the work of May and secondarily that of Cobb and Tillich. Second, eros as embodied and recovered in the work of the Flahertys was considered. Third, the partially religious character of eros was presented as closely related work in contemporary theology was reviewed; and, with this, the religious dimension of the Flahertys' illumination of eros was highlighted, in relation to what had been said in the first two sections of

the chapter. Finally, it was necessary to take a somewhat detailed and academic detour from the general discussion as a framework was presented for the inclusion of eros (as illuminated especially by the Flahertys) in a particular understanding of Christian existence. Overall, a better understanding of the significance of the Flaherty tradition's illumination of eros as a religious and specifically Christian concern has been gained. Two points are important, in conclusion. First, a framework has been established for the affirmation of eros in Christian life. Second, with the Flahertys' work, a good understanding has been gained of that which may be fully recovered and affirmed by modern Christians.

Chapter 3

LIBERATION, AS A RELIGIOUS CONCERN, ILLUMINATED IN THE FLAHERTY TRADITION

As a religious concern, the magnitude of the concept of liberation is considerable. From a religious perspective, it may be ultimately identified with salvation. There is an abundance of literature, religious and secular, which deals with the theme of liberation. Exemplifying this is the recent "theology of liberation" work, dealing with social ethics and focusing on the various oppressed peoples of our world. Liberation remains, too as a basic spiritual concern in Christian thought, closely linked to the idea of one's ultimate justification. With the Flaherty tradition, one gains special insight into the nature of liberation.

A basic definition of liberation may be posited here. Initially, liberation may be understood as a state of being set free--released from some form of enslavement. This is a basic dictionary definition¹ and is open to elaboration. This chapter deals with the idea of liberation as found in the Flahertys' work. The thesis is that

¹Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language (New York: World, 1960).

liberation, as a religious concern, is illuminated profoundly in the Flaherty tradition.

To support this thesis, the central discussion will utilize a good portion of Whitehead's thought. It is interesting that despite the fact that the Flahertys and Whitehead worked in two distinct areas (the former in cinematic arts and the latter in philosophy), the work of each correlates well with the other. The result of this correspondence is a mutual illumination of the artistic vision of the Flahertys and the philosophical vision of Whitehead. With a consideration of the work of the two, an enriched understanding of liberation as a religious issue is possible. Liberation will be dealt with here as being an issue of ultimate existential importance.²

²The ideas of freedom and liberation certainly arise in various other areas of the Flahertys' work. The ideas come to fore in the different production circumstances of the several films, for example. That in nearly thirty years of film-making, Robert Flaherty had a predominant role in making six feature-length films and that of these, only in four was he given a comparatively large degree of freedom in making the films--these facts indicate the difficulty in achieving the needed artistic freedom. Nanook, Moana, Aran, and Louisiana Story were the ones Mrs. Flaherty would call the "free" films, (Frances H. Flaherty, Odyssey of a Film-Maker Urbana, Ill: Beta Phi Mu, 1960. p. 34.) Opportunities to make these came in the form of "gifts," as with the initial generous backing of Revillon Freres for Nanook, Paramount for Moana, the British government for Aran, and the Standard Oil Company of New Jersey for Louisiana Story. Even with the gift of freedom on these, there were occasional problems as on filming Aran and editing Moana and distributing all of the films (except for Aran). The issue of liberation in the Flaherty tradition does arise in a significant way via the issue of artistic

I want to consider liberation within the large context of Flaherty's artistic vision. "Artistic vision" includes much. For my purposes, I mean by it Flaherty's general view of the world, the particular understanding of reality conveyed in his work and, also, his understanding of what was ultimately most important for man. Within this is the presence of liberation.

To develop an understanding of Flaherty's vision and the role of liberation in it, there is much to be gained from Whitehead's philosophical vision. This process may proceed as follows. First, I want to consider a portion of Whitehead's view of reality and relate it, in turn, to Flaherty's view. The first section will deal thus with ontology (the particular understandings of the nature of reality) of both Whitehead and Flaherty. With this, the close correspondence of their views will be indicated. Second, the manner in which both the Flahertys and Whitehead deal with reality will be treated. In particular, attention will be given to how both move towards their commonly shared concern with some notion of liberation. Finally, in the third section of this chapter, I will consider how liberation is understood in the vision of each. Here, Whitehead's discussion of liberation will serve to

freedom; and, it could thus be explored in this context. I have chosen a different approach, however.

elucidate liberation in the Flaherty tradition.

A. THE ONTOLOGICAL VISION

Recognizing the shortcomings involved, I want to summarize briefly a part of the ontological vision of the world developed by Whitehead. The richness of Whitehead's thought will suffer as a result; the philosophical context out of which it partially was developed will be largely neglected. If the reader seeks the broader account, he is referred to Whitehead's own writings or more recent interpretive writings on Whitehead.³

A major and obvious thrust of Whitehead's philosophy, developed not only out of earlier philosophy but also in light of twentieth century scientific understandings of the world, is the denial of what is classically understood as substantial existence in the world. An understanding of the world in which there are self-existent, substantial, and relatively unchanging subjects

³Much of what follows is derived from Alfred North Whitehead, Process and Reality (New York: Macmillan, 1929); Alfred North Whitehead, Adventures of Ideas (New York: Macmillan, 1933); John B. Cobb, Jr., A Christian Natural Theology (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965); Donald Sherburne (ed.) A Key to Whitehead's Process and Reality (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1966). For some of what follows, I will be making use of the study by John B. Cobb, Jr. and Ryusei Takeda, "Moṣa Dharma and Prehensions: A Comparison of Nagarjuna and Whitehead" (Mimeographed, September 1973). This paper contains excellent summaries of key features of Whitehead's thought.

and objects is refuted. In its place, Whitehead posits an understanding of the world characterized by ceaseless change and continuous becoming--a world in process.

Several features of this view of reality may be recounted. First, it should be mentioned that to some degree, Whitehead was concerned with understanding reality at a microscopic level, in addition to the larger macroscopic level. That is, he gave attention to analysing and speculating upon the nature of the smallest and most basic units of reality. From this analysis, he was able to expand this thought into a full cosmology.

The most basic unit of reality in Whitehead's philosophy is what he terms an actual entity, or actual occasion of experience. These microcosmic entities form the macrocosmic entities of our normal experience (e.g., stones, tables, chairs, people). Actual entities are understood as flashes or "drops of experience, complex and interdependent."⁴ These are not substantial specks of material but rather instantaneous flashes of experience, or unities of feelings (understood most basically and simply as having a nonconscious character). These entities may be linked to one another over time to form what Sherburne calls in summary "temporal strands of matter,"⁵ (though

⁴Whitehead, Process and Reality, p. 28.

⁵Sherburne, p. 206.

certainly not "matter" in the classically understood sense). Unlike the unchanging subjects of change in the classical philosophies, which encounter some object and react to it, an actual entity emerges and attains a unity by a convergence of feelings into a subject (i.e., the actual entity). As Cobb writes, an actual entity "comes into being only in virtue of its feelings"; and, "the subject is. . . thrown up by [a] process."⁶ Sherburne provides a fuller description of this process, (and the nature of reality):

An actual entity is "the unity to be ascribed to a particular instance of concrescence."⁷ A concrescence is a growing together of the remnants of the perishing past into the vibrant immediacy of a novel, present unity. An actual entity endures but an instant--the instant of its becoming, its active process of self-creation out of the elements of the perishing past--and then it, too, perishes and as objectively immortal becomes dead datum for succeeding generations of actual entities. The concrescence of an actual entity begins with a passive, receptive moment when the givenness of the past is thrust upon it; it then completes its becoming through a series of supplemental phases that adjust, integrate, and perhaps modify the given data.⁸

Cobb elaborates further:

[Actual entities] are composites of microcosmic processes. These microcosmic processes (concrescences or actual occasions) in their turn do not exist in themselves but only as foci of their data momentarily unified and transmitted beyond themselves. [And quoting Whitehead,⁹] "An actual entity, on its subjective side,

⁶Cobb and Takeda, p. 4.

⁷Whitehead, Process and Reality, p. 323.

⁸Sherburne.

⁹Whitehead, Process and Reality, p. 234.

is nothing else than what the universe is for it, including its own reactions."¹⁰

Out of this understanding of the most basic unit of reality comes a view of the world in continuous process. For Whitehead, it is characterized and undergirded by the principle of Creativity which is "that principle by which the many, which is the universe disjunctively, become the one actual occasion, which is the universe conjunctively." Cobb elaborates, quoting Whitehead as follows:¹¹

For Whitehead, . . . these conjunctions in their turn "are disjunctively 'many' in process of passage into conjunctive unity."¹² "The most general term 'thing'--or equivalent 'entity'--means nothing else than to be one of the 'many' which find their niches in each instance of concrescence. Each instance of concrescence is itself the novel individual 'thing' in question. There are not 'the concrescence' and the 'novel thing': when we analyze the novel thing we find nothing but the concrescence."¹³

One further area of this understanding of reality may be described before some summary remarks are made. This has to do with the interrelatedness of the world and the question of the distinction between subject and object. On this matter, Cobb provides a neat summary:

Whitehead makes extensive use of this distinction between subject and object. . . . That is, contrary to substantialist views, there is no object apart from a subject and no subject apart from an object. Whitehead explains this more intelligibly through his

¹⁰Cobb and Takeda, p. 5.

¹¹Ibid., pp. 5-6.

¹²Whitehead, Process and Reality, p. 32.

¹³Ibid., p. 321.

concept of prehension, which functions as a transaction relating an experiencing subject to a datum as its object. The datum of the prehension can be an actual entity, an eternal object, a proposition, or a nexus, but in no case can it exist independently as an object. . . . It is through being felt that the datum becomes an "object" and then it is the object of the subject's feeling. Insofar as the actual entity as datum can be described without reference to a subject prehending it, that actual entity is only potentially an object. It is actually an object only as prehended in a con-
 creting subject. Thus, the object never exists in itself as object. . . . Consideration of any element of that concrete transaction--whether of the subject, the activity, or the object--as if it existed in itself involves abstraction and false substantialization. In Whitehead's terms, it is an instance of the fallacy of misplaced concreteness.¹⁴

What emerges out of this understanding of the most basic features of the world are important generalizations. It should be reiterated that it is these actual entities which make up the larger macrocosmic realities of ordinary experience--tables, chairs, people--termed by Whitehead, with some differentiation, "societies" and "nexūs." These macrocosmic realities are a part of the same process as the microcosmic entities, by virtue of the fact that they are made up of actual entities. And with this, the following summary statements may be made.

Most importantly, coming out of this understanding of reality, as has been said, is a view of the world as continually in process, becoming, and ceaseless change. Though there is continuity in the change from one instant

¹⁴Cobb and Takeda, p. 6.

to the next, there is also a basic and ultimate dimension of discontinuity. One actual entity is distinct from the next, and so on, even though there may be an extremely high degree of similarity or identity between them. Cobb likens the basic process to a motion picture, with its "succession of discontinuous pictures."¹⁵ (In this view, incidentally, it may be suggested that the motion picture can symbolize reality in a way much more true or accurate than normally thought.) With this change and movement in the world, it may be possible, importantly, (though few process philosophers have discussed it, including Cobb and Whitehead) to speak of the presence of rhythm in the world. Most basically, reality is in a state of change.

Secondly, two basic points may be made in light of Cobb's summary (quoted on the two previous pages). First, everything in the world is very much interrelated. Second, every actual entity is seen as both subject as well as real or potential object for every other becoming subject. These two points go together. By virtue of Whitehead's treatment of the subject-object distinction, as well as his understanding of the process by which a new actual entity is formed and actualizes itself (in large part, though not only, as a product of the total past), there is a new understanding of the total interrelatedness of the world.

¹⁵Cobb, A Christian Natural Theology, p. 26.

Further, with Whitehead's treatment of the subject-object distinction, what has been seen classically as the objective world, having objective reality only in the sense that it is perceived by man, is now (in Whitehead's philosophy) accorded its own subjective reality.¹⁶ The world is real--in a subjective way--in itself, as it is in the overall process of change. The world has its own reality: those things which in large measure make it up (i.e., actual entities) have their own subjective experience and are as well either actually or potentially an object for the other actual entities. The two main points here, again, are:

- (1) the interrelatedness of all things in the world, and
- (2) the reality of the things of the world in themselves.

Many areas of Whitehead's philosophy, related to what has been said, have not been treated. For my purposes, most of them are not immediately relevant and are beyond the scope of the summary offered here. A few of these will be treated later on. We may turn shortly to Flaherty's view of the world and to the question of the correspondence of the two views. With this, we will have a more adequate basis for treating liberation.

The differences in terms of the medium and methods employed by Whitehead, on the one hand, and the Flahertys

¹⁶This matter is discussed at length in John B. Cobb, Jr., Is It Too Late? (Beverly Hills, Ca: Bruce, 1972), Chapters 11-12.

on the other are obvious. Whitehead, in philosophy, worked in a discursive mode, seeking to be informed both by earlier philosophy and modern scientific understandings of the world. The Flahertys, in film, worked in a nondiscursive mode, seeking to be informed by their experience of the world itself. Some additional insight into their work is gained, however, especially from the later (discursive) writings and lectures by Mrs. Flaherty. The media by which both sought to convey their understandings of reality were markedly different. An acknowledgment of these differences is in order. (Relevant here, however, is a statement of Stephenson and Debrix, speaking of the matter of space and time in the cinema; they write that "it is interesting to note that the cinema can demonstrate visually what science has discovered empirically or theoretically."¹⁷ Thus, perhaps, the distance between the respective mediums of the Flahertys and Whitehead is not quite as great as may first seem.) Overall, I want to argue that there is a close correspondence of the two visions of the world which emerge.

First, in Whitehead's terms, the Flahertys are concerned with the macrocosmic dimension of reality. Their concern is with what Whitehead calls the "societies" or "nexūs" of actual entities. At some significant points,

¹⁷Ralph Stephenson and Jean R. Debrix, The Cinema as Art (Maryland: Penguin Books, 1969), p. 124.

however, the Flahertys touch upon the microcosmic. Mrs. Flaherty's writings discussed in Chapter 1 on the film Seifriz on Protoplasm and Flaherty's The Potter may be recalled. The Seifriz film moves in a direction of concern with the microcosmic process; The Potter is on a plane with macrocosmic process. Nevertheless, Mrs. Flaherty understands there to be an intimate connection between the two. Her statement may be referred to, (quoted below, p. 105). Indeed, from her discussion it is clear that though the films employ different perspectives (one being the micro- and the other the macro-), they are concerned with essentially the same phenomenon. The Seifriz film is in closer proximity to Whitehead's microcosmic analysis. Yet, the Flaherty films, with the macrocosmic perspective, convey an understanding of the world--an ontological vision--closely akin to Whitehead.

Parenthetically relevant to the question of differentiation between the microcosmic and the macrocosmic are some general comments on the nature of film and the arts. First, Coleridge's comment may be noted: "the mystery of genius in the fine arts . . . [is] to make the external internal, [and] the internal external."¹⁸ Relevant, too, is Bazin's admonition to "evaluate the film image not in terms

¹⁸Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 15.

of what it adds to reality but what it reveals of reality."¹⁹ Stephenson and Debrix write, "film . . . gives us more of physical reality than any other art."²⁰ And Sam Keen writes, "It is all too common . . . for the patterns and schemata which have been created as means to understand individual atoms of experience to solidify and become substitutes for experience of concrete reality."²¹ While these somewhat diverse comments are offered in a cursory way, they do indicate even more the closeness between the microcosmic and the macrocosmic. This will be explored further when I deal with non-preconception and perception.

The proximity between the macro and the micro becomes still more evident as the Flahertys' own ontology is considered. In viewing the films, one is able to see the presence of at least three basic understandings of reality which were affirmed by Whitehead. First, the world revealed in the films is one which is in a state of continuous change and becoming. Second, everything in the world has its own reality--a thing is both subject as well as real or potential object. Third, the whole world is

¹⁹Andre Bazin, What is Cinema? (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), I, 6.

²⁰Stephenson and Debrix, pp. 32-33.

²¹Sam Keen, Apology for Wonder (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), p. 50.

interrelated.

To elaborate: First, reality as seen in the Flaherty films is a reality in continuous change. This view is present in a nondiscursive way. The simple fact that the Flahertys worked with motion picture photography implicitly attests to this feature of their view of the world. Life is motion; it is thus affirmed as such in the motion picture. It is dealt with in terms of an art medium most closely representing it. Virtually everything in the Flaherty films moves. Everything is in the process of change. This is evident in nearly every part of every film, from the opening shots of Nanook to the closing shots of Louisiana Story. In a few shots of inanimate objects (e.g., shots of the cliffs in Aran, the land in The Land, or of the oil derrick in Louisiana Story), with Flaherty's camera in motion and looking at these things with patience and care, one seems to sense even in these shots the presence of something happening, or changing, however subtly. One could elaborate here endlessly, describing scene after scene of the films. There is no need. It is a simple, obvious, and profound feature of the Flahertys' basic ontology. The world is always in change; the Flahertys tried to see and record some few small parts of this change. The notion of the world having unchanging substantial existence is undercut in the Flahertys' work. (If their world had been understood as having unchanging substances, simple

still photography would have sufficed for them.)

There is some discursive evidence for this part of their view of reality, in the writings of Mrs. Flaherty. In a short paragraph on Moana, she writes of the camera and the film and its subject:

This miraculous machine! Life expressed in motion, ritual gestures, beautiful movements "worn smooth by time"--movements too fine for the eye to see, but that the camera could catch, and catching them, could capture the very spirit of these people.²²

In Chapter 1 I spoke of the Flahertys' concern for life and its rhythmic mystery. In some words quoted there is perhaps Mrs. Flaherty's best statement on the Flahertys' view of reality as motion and continuous change. It is worth repeating, in part. On the Seifriz film, she writes:

That life is movement we all know. But we can see how deeply this is so in this beautiful film which shows us. . . the rhythmic flow, the measured movement, in protoplasm, the primordial stuff of which we all are made. . . . The beauty of this film is its simple and profound approach to this rhythmic mystery. . . . Leonardo da Vinci says "Where there is warmth, there is life, and where there is life there is the movement of love." The movement of love, the mysterious rhythm of life--this is the life of film.²³

As discussed earlier, the Flaherty films treat macroscopically what the Seifriz film treats microscopically, i.e., the same phenomenon: life expressed in motion--as changing rhythmic process rather than unchanging substances.

²²Flaherty, p. 21.

²³Ibid., p. 39.

A next main part of the Flahertys' understanding of reality is the view that everything in the changing world is real: it is both subject and (real or potential) object. As the Flaherty method is reviewed, one rediscovers the importance of this dimension of the Flahertys' view of reality. It may be recalled that basic to Robert Flaherty's attitude to life were the characteristics of wonder and erotic love. Much of what Flaherty encountered in life he called "marvelous" or "extraordinary." With this, there is the indication of the understanding of the inherent subjective reality of the world. Flaherty, characteristically, would look at an object rather than down at it; the perceived object would in a sense have its own subjective worth. As discussed, the process of seeing, itself, was regarded by the Flahertys as intrinsically, rather than instrumentally, good. Seeing in this way brought the perceiver into relation with an object wherein the object itself was accorded its own subjective reality. What was seen, or filmed, was allowed to be itself. The Flaherty way of seeing and filming was characterized by non-preconception. One sought to avoid all preconceptions in his encounter with a subject-object. Non-preconception entailed non-exploitation. A person perceives or explores another subject-object with reverence, seeking himself to be freely informed by the other. Even the camera was regarded by Flaherty as having its own kind of subjective

reality, as with his question to the camera to the effect, "What is this mystery you can see better than I?" The word "mystery" in reference to the object filmed bespeaks of the subjective reality of that thing--yet even the camera with its lens is regarded as a kind of subjective "thou," rather than an objective "it." The subjective-objective film-maker used the subjective-objective camera to film the subjective-objective world.

The length of a typical Flaherty shot, staying with an object for a considerable period, also indicates the kind of subjective reality Flaherty understood the world to have. Flaherty sought to discover and reveal a thing's real essence--its own "inner spirit." This is especially evident in the many shots of the "ordinary people" in the films "doing the ordinary things of everyday life." It is equally evident in the shots of the animals (e.g., the elephants being elephants in the river in Elephant Boy, the racoon being itself in the tree in Louisiana Story), the plants, and even the inorganic things that the camera sees (e.g., the oil derrick of Louisiana Story or the rocky terrain of Aran)--these, too, reveal a reality which is real in itself. In these shots, something of a thing's true essence or "inner spirit" may be revealed with sudden intensity. This process was described in detail in Chapter 1. The key point here is that concerning the subjective-objective reality of the world, including the

subhuman world.

Finally, the world of the Flahertys is very much interrelated, and it ought to be seen as such. In the opening swamp sequence of Louisiana Story, the viewer senses a peace and harmony--a profound feeling of inter-relatedness--as Flaherty's camera sees and reveals all of the different areas of life present in the swamp. The swamp itself, the area of the filming, was physically small. Yet the sequence of shots, revealing the harmonious and interrelated order, has qualities of the infinite and timeless. Nothing is separate or segregated. Each creature and thing--animal, fish, plant, water, wind, light, and so on--are natural parts of what one senses to be an unlimited whole. Later in the same film, while the boy is looking for his lost racoon, the camera stops twice to look at a spider weaving its web. In the context of the film, this is perfectly natural. The spider is of the same world as the boy. One senses an interrelationship of the two, not at all profound yet completely natural. The world as complexly interrelated and whole is a natural part of the Flahertys' view of reality. In contrast to a Flaherty film, could one imagine the camera of a typical Hollywood Western, stopping in the middle of a chase sequence to watch a ground squirrel digging a hole? One would be certainly surprised, if not stunned. Yet for the Flaherty film such a sequence of shots is natural, as all parts of

the world are interrelated.

This understanding of the interrelatedness of reality is derived largely from the Flaherty way of seeing. With non-preconceived seeing, one seeks to discover the inner qualities of things; and in seeing this inner quality one senses the inherent relatedness of all things. In several instances, Mrs. Flaherty speaks of the inter-relatedness that one can understand, the "unity" present, as one thing encounters another; and she speaks of the overcoming of separateness that is possible among different things. In a statement quoted earlier (p. 64), she speaks of the feeling of oneness the viewer may have with the potter, in Flaherty's film on the potter, as one opens himself up and follows intimately the movement of the potter symbolized on film. She speaks in the same way of the viewer's experience with Nanook: the feeling of total inter-relationship--"oneness"--that is possible in watching the film, (quoted above, pp. 62-63). This is the "participation mystique," of which Mrs. Flaherty speaks. It necessarily entails an understanding of the world as thoroughly interrelated: each part participating in a communion with all being.

To give further emphasis to this part of their view of reality, Mrs. Flaherty writes:

Here is the "way" of the camera, of this machine: through its sensitivity to movement it can take us into a new dimension of seeing, through the mysterious

rhythmic impulses of life and love take us inward into the spirit, into the unity of the spirit.²⁴

And, on the Flaherty method, she writes:

The way of discovering or releasing, with its discipline of letting be. . . the exploratory way--for a natural poetry, for a greater awareness of the essential truth of things as they are, a deeper communion with all being.²⁵

Overall, the ontologies of the Flahertys and Whitehead emerge as remarkably compatible. Their difference in methodologies, as has been discussed, is marked. Yet, both seem to share closely similar understandings of the nature of reality. Both see reality as being in constant change. Whitehead argues strongly against the notion of substantial existence, as he analyses the world microcosmically; Flaherty's work and Mrs. Flaherty's writing give implicit support to this view from a macrocosmic perspective. Both understand the world to have subjective reality apart from any perception by man. Again, the emphasis on this is explicitly so in Whitehead and more implicitly so in the Flahertys. Finally, both see the world as totally interrelated. The nature of this interrelationship is treated by Whitehead from within the overall context of the process of change in the world, and is thus an interrelatedness explicitly in terms of process. The Flahertys affirm the interrelatedness of reality, but

²⁴Ibid., p. 40.

²⁵Ibid., p. 42.

without the explicit emphasis of the processive context found in Whitehead. The two views are nevertheless wholly compatible. Emphases do vary, however, partly as a result of the mediums employed.

B. DEALING WITH REALITY: MOVING TOWARDS LIBERATION

Given these understandings of reality, one may go on to discuss the nature of existence, specifically in relation to the question of liberation. Both the Flahertys and Whitehead are concerned with this matter, and both move in the same direction in their work. To each, the matter of perception is central. Whitehead centers his discussion on the nature of feelings and what he terms "prehensions." The Flahertys, similarly, developed what was called the "exploratory method," a central basis of which was "non-preconception." Whitehead moves his discussion of perception towards the question of liberation, termed "Peace." His treatment is explicit. In it is to be found what is ultimately the liberation of Flaherty's artistic vision.

The ontological situation understood by Whitehead and the Flahertys is characterized by the inextricable interrelatedness of all things, the lack of substantiality, the reality (or, the presence of value) in all things, as well as constant change or becoming. Whitehead terms this situation as the creative advance into novelty. Such a phrase is compatible with the Flahertys' vision. In terms

of human existence, Whitehead argues that the natural direction towards liberation or freedom (though he does not use these specific words) is for man, what Cobb calls in summary, "the widening of horizons of concern."²⁶

With this ontological situation, with all things in process--and, in a sense, lacking permanence and substance --Whitehead sees a considerable threat to the meaning of existence. In Adventures of Ideas he writes, "Decay, Transition, Loss, Displacement belong to the essence of the Creative Advance"; and, "life might be understood as a "flash of occasional enjoyments lighting up a mass of pain and misery, a bagatelle of transient experience."²⁷ The Flahertys, too, understand loss and suffering to be a natural part of life. The country of Nanook, along with its other characteristics, is described by the (interestingly, Buddhist) word "emptiness."²⁸ This dimension of reality may be said to be understood by Mrs. Flaherty as follows, writing of the North:

The teaching of the North was its immensity, its vast simplicity, its emptiness, unclutteredness, its clarity and purity, and its elemental strength, wind and snow endlessly carving new worlds of hazard and beauty--of a mysterious, mystical beauty.²⁹

²⁶Cobb and Takeda, p. 7.

²⁷Whitehead, Adventures of Ideas, pp. 368-369.
Cited in *ibid*.

²⁸Flaherty, p. 12.

²⁹*Ibid*.

Similar in this context is Nanook's statement in an igloo with Flaherty one bleak night in the barren north: "Surely no house of the kablumak [i.e., white man] could be so wonderful";³⁰ this implicitly attests to an understanding of life as a "flash of occasional enjoyments lighting up a mass of pain. . ." to which Whitehead refers. Further, life on the Aran Islands clearly contains this dimension of loss and suffering, which is a part of reality. Also, in accounting for the practice of tatooing on Samoa, Mrs. Flaherty writes in reference to Moana that "where there is no suffering, there is no strength."³¹ And then there is the shot in Louisiana Story of the alligator catching and devouring in one gulp a beautiful water bird. For Whitehead and the Flahertys, then, a necessary part of the ontological situation is suffering and, in some sense, the possibility of loss.

This part of reality poses a threat to the meaning of existence. In part, to combat it, Whitehead posits and develops the understanding of the "consequent nature" of God, which constitutes a grounding for the meaning and value of all events in the universe. While this understanding is significant to Whitehead, it is not to the Flahertys. While a notion of God with this consequent nature does not conflict with the Flahertys' vision of

³⁰Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 16.

³¹*Ibid.*, p. 22.

reality, one finds no explicit reference to God in the Flahertys' work.

Yet, Whitehead moves in another direction, too, towards the question of the meaning in life and liberation. And it is this area of Whitehead which is found to be fully developed in the artistic vision of the Flahertys. This area deals with the nature of perception.³²

Both Whitehead and the Flahertys affirm Susanne Langer's point that "the limits of language are not the last limits of experience, and things inaccessible to language may have their own forms of conception, that is to say, their own symbolic devices."³³ Both recognize the superiority of other forms of symbolic expression (e.g., film, music, and the other arts) which may better deal and come to terms with experience. Yet, even beyond this, both affirm direct intuitive insight in experience and recognize, in terms of direct experience, a given degree of discord between the appearance of the reality perceived and the reality itself. I will first explain this in terms of

³²On this matter, I have found the work of Cobb and Takeda to be excellent. My discussion following from this point, is akin to some features of the basic outline of their study of Nagarjuna and Whitehead. A portion of my discussion here is indebted to their summary treatment of Whitehead. It may be noted that I am engaged here in a discussion of Whitehead and Flaherty which is analogous to their discussion on Whitehead and Nagarjuna.

³³Susanne K. Langer, Philosophy in a New Key (New York: New American Library, 1951), p. 224.

Whitehead's analysis.

In Whitehead's ontology, "prehensions" play a key role. Quoting Whitehead, Cobb writes, "A prehension is a 'process of appropriation of a particular element'³⁴ by an actual entity from its universe."³⁵ A prehension relates the prehending subject to the object. Whitehead writes:

Every prehension consists of three factors: (a) the "subject" which is prehending, namely, the actual entity in which that prehension is a concrete element; (b) the "datum" which is prehended; (c) the "subjective form" which is how that subject prehends that datum.³⁶

There is a basic ontological problem involved in the process of prehension. That is the problem of deception or falsification present in the process. A datum prehended may be understood as what in reality it is. In this sense it is termed the "initial datum." How the prehending subject prehends the initial datum allows for that datum to be understood as the "objective datum." This is the initial datum as it is prehended by the subject. There is a distinction--a varying degree of discontinuity--between what the datum is initially and what it is objectified. In this gap, or discontinuity, there is deception or falsification of some degree: an absence of truth, a lack of conformity from the Appearance to the Reality. To explain

³⁴Whitehead, Process and Reality, p. 335.

³⁵Cobb and Takeda, p. 8.

³⁶Whitehead, Process and Reality, p. 35.

this further, Cobb provides the following statements from Whitehead:

"There is a transition from the initial data to the objective datum effected by the elimination. The initial data constitute a multiplicity, or merely one 'proper' entity, while the objective datum is a 'nexus,' a proposition, or a 'proper' entity of some categoreal type. There is a concrescence of the initial data into the objective datum, made possible by the elimination, and effected by the subjective form. The objective datum is the perspective of the initial datum."³⁷ "Thus the initial data are felt under a 'perspective' which is the objective datum of the feeling."³⁸ Thus the initial data "are felt under an abstraction which objectifies the i:³⁷Ibid., p. 338
a perspective involves an element w³⁹Cobb and Takeda, p. 8.
as/. . . falsification."³⁹

³⁸Ibid., p.

⁴⁰Whitehead, Process and Reality

That this "falsification" is ce: Whitehead understands it is clear f⁴¹Ibid.
of decision. "'Decision' cannot be casual adjunct of an actual entity."⁴²Cobb and Takeda, p. 8.
very meaning of actuality."⁴⁰ Decision is that "whereby what is 'given' is separated off from what for that occasion is 'not given'. . . The word 'decision' does not here imply conscious judgment, though in some 'decisions' consciousness will be a factor. The word is used in its root sense of a 'cutting off.'"⁴¹ This means that "cutting off" is the very meaning of actuality."⁴² sness will be a factor. The sense of a 'cutting off.'"⁴¹

The distinction between "initial datum" and "objective datum" parallels the distinction between "Reality" and "Apprearance," as used by Whitehead. In Adventures of Ideas

³⁷Ibid., p. 338

³⁸Ibid., p. 353.

³⁹Cobb and Takeda, p. 8.

⁴⁰Whitehead, Process and Reality, p. 68.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Cobb and Takeda, p. 8.

he elaborates:

There is the Reality from which the occasion of experience springs--a Reality of inescapable, stubborn fact; and there is the Appearance with which the occasion attains its final individuality--an Appearance including its adjustment of the Universe by simplification, valuation, transmutation, anticipation. . . . Sense perception, which dominates the appearance of things, in its own nature re-arranges, and thus in a way distorts. Also there can be no mere blunt truth about the Appearance which it provides. In its own nature Sense-perception is an interpretation, and this interpretation may be completely misleading.⁴³

This same feature of reality--the distinction between the initial and objective datum and between Appearance and Reality, along with the problematic consequences entailed--are attested to by the Flahertys. Again, in their work there is not even a sizeable fraction of a discursive treatment of the matter that is to be found in Whitehead. Nevertheless, it is present, and profoundly so, in their concern with "preconception" and "non-preconception." These two terms with their implications parallel directly the implications of the terms "objective datum"/"initial datum" and "Appearance"/"Reality." In their work it is seen that as one comes to terms with reality with a various set of preconceptions, objectifying what he sees, and fitting what he experiences into preconceived categories, much is lost. There arises a considerable disjunction between the appearance perceived (the objective

⁴³Whitehead, Adventures of Ideas, pp. 377-378.

data) and the reality (the initial data) experienced (or, prehended). Distortion, deception, falsification ensue. Against preconception, the Flahertys developed their understanding of non-preconception. The following statements of Mrs. Flaherty are relevant:

Non-preconception. . . . When you do not preconceive, then you go finding out. . . . You begin to explore.⁴⁴

What you have to do is to let go, let go every thought of your own, wipe your mind clean, fresh, innocent, newborn, sensitive as unexposed film to take up the impressions around you, and let what will come in. This is the pregnant void, the fertile state of no-mind. This is non-preconception, the beginning of discovery.⁴⁵

In a Whiteheadian perspective, non-preconception--in its ideal form--would approach a total experience of the initial data. In practice, it moves radically in this direction.

The nature of the phenomenon of perception, involving what Whitehead terms the discontinuity of Appearance and Reality within the process of prehension, is recognized by the Flahertys. Their concern with non-preconception attests to their understanding of the importance of this matter.

To mention non-preconception here moves my discussion a bit ahead of itself--beyond the problem involved in perception and on towards the solution. A bit more needs to be said first about the nature of this problem. The

⁴⁴Flaherty, p. 10.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 20.

problem is that prehensions, the "Concrete Facts of Relatedness" in the universe,⁴⁶ necessarily involve dislocation and deception. In prehending, with the process of decision involved in the concrescence, a "cutting off"--and hence, loss--is a necessarily given ingredient. The threat here is described by Whitehead as follows:

A feeling of dislocation of Appearance from Reality is the final destructive force, robbing life of its zest for adventure. It spells the decadence of civilization, by stripping from it the very reason for its existence.⁴⁷

To counter this threat, Whitehead develops a distinction between "the inevitable element of difference between appearance and reality and the destructive dislocation of appearance and reality."⁴⁸ With this, he develops his understanding of the "primordial nature" of God, as follows:⁴⁹

[God is a] factor in the Universe constituting a general drive towards the conformation of Appearance to Reality. This drive would then constitute a factor in each occasion persuading an aim at such truth as is proper to the special appearance in question. This concept of truth, proper to each special appearance, would mean that the appearance has not built itself up by the inclusion of elements that are foreign to the reality from which it springs. The appearance will then be a generalization and an adaptation of emphasis,

⁴⁶Whitehead, Process and Reality, p. 32.

⁴⁷Whitehead, Adventures of Ideas, p. 378.

⁴⁸Cobb and Takeda, p. 9.

⁴⁹Whitehead, Adventures of Ideas, p. 378.

but not an importation of qualities and relations without any corresponding exemplifications in the reality.

With Whitehead's understanding of God, with both the primordial and consequent natures, one is able to affirm the inherent value in reality in positive conjunction with the forward movement of the process of reality. With the primordial nature, one may also speak of the possibility of a prehending subject's surrender or selfless openness to God's presence in reality aiming at, and urging one towards, the conformance of Appearance to Reality.

This explicit understanding of God is not found in the Flahertys' vision. Yet, the dynamics present in Whitehead's treatment of prehension are clearly present.

The Whiteheadian notion of the distinction between the destructive difference between Reality and Appearance and the inevitable difference of the two is understandable in the Flahertys' work. First, their struggle against and opposition to preconceived seeing point to their awareness of the "destructive" difference between Reality and Appearance--and thus, their opposition to this. The Flahertys' exploratory method accords with the idea of "inevitable" difference, and seeks to make the difference as small as possible. Coogan's work on the Flaherty method supports this. A part of his account of the method follows:

. . .an existing phenomenon was contemplated as far as possible without any prior assumptions about it, and its essential structure was allowed to emerge. The role of the camera was not that of capturing previously

conceived images, but rather that of exploring the raw material of experience in the hope that it might discover and reveal things the eye had missed. . . . [H]is films first took shape on the screen as the footage was projected over and over again. The symbols and their relationships evidently did not exist in his mind in any decisive way before he exposed his film, but rather emerged during repeated and concentrated study of the exploratory footage.⁵⁰

There are some important words here. The phrase "raw material of experience" corresponds with Whitehead's "initial data." The word "decisive" is equally significant. The fact that Flaherty allowed the reality--the raw material--to exist long into the process of producing a film, holding back any decision--or conscious cutting off of some aspect of the image--this indicates an effort to lessen greatly the Reality-Appearance difference. He sought in his method to move closer to the un-cut-off Reality. Also relevant here is the point that decision, with its cutting-off, necessarily involves separation; and Mrs. Flaherty periodically expressed her opposition to separation, as (for example) her statement in the film Hidden and Seeking that "separation is war, aggression, death."⁵¹

⁵⁰W. Jack Coogan, "Some Notes Toward a Flaherty Study Center." (Mimeographed, 1973), p. 3.

⁵¹Frances Flaherty quoted in the film: Peter Werner, Hidden and Seeking (Producer: Tom Werner, Distribution: Contemporary Films, 1972).

With this, the Flaherty method involves surrender. And surrender entails love. The presence of love in the Flaherty films has already been discussed at length, above. Yet, Mrs. Flaherty's words are relevant here:

Love's method is surrender, the giving up of the self to that which is greater than the self, in order that the greater, the beyond, may come through.⁵²

Love in this sense is intimately linked to non-preconceived perception in the Flaherty method. Again, there are close parallels to Whitehead here. For Whitehead, a selfless openness or surrender to the activity of God's primordial nature is necessary in order that one may more closely approach reality, i.e., lessen the inevitable difference between Reality and Appearance. This giving up of the self accords with love: it opens up the self to "that which is greater than the self, in order that the greater, the beyond, may come through." The work of both Whitehead and the Flahertys is quite compatible in this area. The selfless love embodied in the Flaherty method on Nanook exemplifies this: as Coogan points out, the distance between the viewer and Nanook's family (as in one scene) is not only destroyed, but a "special sense of relatedness" is present.⁵³ The "relatedness" here harmonizes with Whitehead's positive notion of "inevitable difference,"

⁵²Frances Flaherty quoted in Coogan, p. 14.

⁵³Coogan, *ibid.*

as the difference between Reality and Appearance becomes diminished.

Out of this, it may be seen that along with sharing essentially the same ontological views, Whitehead and the Flahertys treat the area of perception in closely parallel ways. Both share a sense of the problems involved, and both move in close and compatible directions for their solutions to the problem. The ultimate solution is what I am calling here "liberation." And, on this, there is again a process of mutual illumination in the work of the two as to what constitutes liberation.

C. LIBERATION

A basic solution to the problems of human existence lies in the development of a new way of seeing. This is true equally for Whitehead and the Flahertys. This new way of seeing is ultimately the liberation of the Flaherty tradition. Many, if not all, of its characteristics have been mentioned and discussed at length to this point. It remains here for me to develop the context as well as the coherency of the concept. Whitehead provides some assistance here. And, it may be said that in the Flaherty films is found the visual exemplification of Whitehead's ultimate goal of liberation, termed Peace.

Given the nature of reality as seen by Whitehead and the Flahertys, as well as the problems of existence

ensuing--treated here in terms of experience and, specifically, perception--we may now consider this new way of seeing.⁵⁴ This may be done briefly.

⁵⁴It should be noted that Coogan takes a slightly different approach to this whole matter. My own approach is compatible with Coogan's, though it proceeds from a different starting point, arising more out of a specifically philosophical perspective relevant to the Flaherty tradition. Coogan's work should be cited here. He writes:

[The films'] theme, as indeed was the theme of all his work, is the relationship between man and his environment; in this he anticipated by fifty years a major concern of our culture. In one respect, however, he is still ahead of us: he conceived this problem not in sociological or anthropological categories, but primarily in what we would call spiritual ones; in fact, Mrs. Flaherty has described these works as "films of the spirit of man." To the task of living, man has brought resources possessed by no other creature: art, ritual, and above all, imagination. These resources changed the task entirely, and what for other species was essentially a biological process became for man an imaginative one as well, to the extent that in the modern world the imaginative crises far outweigh the biological ones. The subject of the Flaherty films can thus be defined even more precisely: it is the role of man's imagination and his spirit in his encounter with the world. Nanook and Man of Aran depict biological challenges transcended by the unique qualities of the human spirit; Moana presents a world where the absence of biological challenge demands the creation of an imaginative one; and The Land and Louisiana Story deal with the crisis precipitated in our own culture by its attempt to deal with biological problems in an imaginatively impoverished way. [Coogan, pp. 4-5].

The solution which Coogan considers is the same one with which I am dealing. Coogan's emphasis is on the spiritual problem of the imaginative crisis and he thus gives emphasis to the solution, characterizing it by the imaginative. Again, I think it is wholly compatible with my own work.

Beyond prehension, involving the small inevitable difference between Appearance and Reality, there is the experience of Peace, in Whiteheadian thought. At the conclusion of Adventures of Ideas, Whitehead writes of Peace as follows:

Peace. . . is not the negative conception of anaesthesia. It is a positive feeling which crowns the "life and motion" of the soul. It is hard to define and difficult to speak of. It is not a hope for the future, nor it is an interest in present details. It is a broadening of feeling due to the emergence of some deep metaphysical insight, unverbilized and yet momentous in its coordination of values. Its first effect is the removal of the stress of acquisitive feeling arising from the soul's preoccupation with itself. Thus Peace carries with it a surpassing of personality. There is an inversion of relative values. It is primarily a trust in the efficacy of Beauty. It is a sense that fineness of achievement is, as it were, a key unlocking treasures that the narrow nature of things would keep remote. There is thus involved a grasp of infinitude, an appeal beyond boundaries. More accurately, it preserves the springs of energy, and at the same time masters them for the avoidance of paralyzing distractions. The trust in the self-justification of Beauty introduces faith, where reason fails to reveal the details.

The experience of Peace is largely beyond the control of purpose. It comes as a gift. The deliberate aim at Peace very easily passes into its bastard substitute, Anaesthesia. In other words, in the place of a quality of "life and motion," there is substituted their destruction. Thus Peace is the removal of inhibition and not its introduction. It results in a wider sweep of conscious interest. It enlarges the field of attention. Thus Peace is self-control at its widest, --at the width where the "self" has been lost, and interest has been transferred to coordinations wider than personality. ⁵⁵

⁵⁵Whitehead, Adventures of Ideas, pp. 367-368.

In this statement on Peace is the liberation possible with the "exploratory method" of the Flaherty tradition. As discussed in Chapter 1, with non-preconception one can explore, discover, and finally experience revelation. Compare Whitehead's statement with Mrs. Flaherty's account of her Samoan experience--an experience akin to what the viewer may have in his encounter with the Flaherty films and an experience embodied in the Flaherty method overall:

Samoa was my first experience of living, as Bob had lived so long, with people of another culture. They were a friendly people. When we met they greeted me "Talofa!"--my love to you. We would talk a little, perhaps about their children and my children. They would say, "Manuia"--God be with you--and I had absolutely no feeling of being alien to them. Until this thing happened, and happened so suddenly, like a clap of thunder or a flash of lightning, that I remember it exactly, and exactly how I felt, as suddenly everything seemed to fall away from me, everything but the immediacy of that moment, and the presence, the overwhelming presence, of these most lovely people. For the first time I saw them. I saw them as I had never seen them before. And not only that: I saw every least thing as though I had never seen it before. It was as though I had come to some sort of threshold, and stepping over had come into a new world and found myself a new person.⁵⁶

"A sudden intensity of perception, an overwhelming sense of the loveliness of that which is perceived, and a new sense of unity and oneness with it,"⁵⁷ Coogan writes, noting the key features of the experience. The experience, like

⁵⁶Frances H. Flaherty, quoted in Coogan, pp. 10-11.

⁵⁷Coogan, *ibid.*, p. 11.

Peace, came as a gift. Whitehead's statement seems to describe accurately and fully Mrs. Flaherty's statement. One may read it again and again. Coogan writes, "The same intensity of perception and the same overwhelming sense of loveliness and oneness that Mrs. Flaherty first discovered in Samoa are the basic content of all the Flaherty films."⁵⁸ This is the experience of liberation.

It is non-preconception, coming to reality and prehending it without de-cisive and blinding preconceptions that allows for the possibility of the experience of liberation--"a positive feeling which crowns the 'life and motion' of the soul," (in Whitehead's words). The films testify visually to the experience of Peace--liberation--a spiritual experience of ultimate existential importance. Quoting Coogan again:

To evoke a sense of beauty, he [Flaherty] uses the abstractive power of the camera to reveal the patterns and rhythms of life; to evoke a sense of unity and wholeness, he uses the constructive power of editing to organize these into large, complex structures. . . . Flaherty uses his medium not only as a tool for exploratory seeing and for recording and sharing his discoveries, but also as an enormously powerful artistic vehicle for his own deepest intuitions about the meaning of man's experience.⁵⁹

It is in this way that the Flaherty tradition illuminates the religious, spiritual concern of liberation.

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 6.

CONCLUSION

A concluding word is now in order. A few points may be made. First, basic support has been offered here for the broad thesis of this dissertation. Eros and liberation, as two concerns in contemporary religious thought, are illuminated in the Flaherty tradition. In Chapters 2 and 3, I have tried to provide wide ranging support for the two basic areas of the thesis.

Yet, a general continuity of all three chapters should be noted as well. There is on the one hand a special relationship between the first chapter on the Flaherty method and each of the two following ones. For the Flaherty tradition, and in a McLuhanesque sense, it may be maintained that the medium is the message. The Flaherty method as a whole seems to embody naturally and necessarily both the experience of eros and the experience of liberation as described above. In this sense the medium--the Flaherty use of film--is the message. The method integrally involves the experiences of eros and liberation. The vital connection, for example, between non-preconception and eros or liberation should be obvious in the detailed discussions of the major chapters.

There remains the question of the relationship between Chapters 2 and 3 on the experiences of liberation

and eros. Certainly, there is a similarity in the experiences. The ingredients of the one are to a degree the same as the other, such as openness, non-imposition, discovery, revelation, a sense of unity and oneness. Yet there are differences in the experiences; e.g., eros has a dimension related to the creative drive of man not found in liberation. Still, there are basic differences of massive degree and of context. Unlike eros, liberation occurs in an absolute context of ultimate existential importance. And, the liberation of the Whiteheadian Peace is of a magnitude much greater than what would be a more frequent and (while not mundane) common experience of erotic love. Peace comes as a gift; eros does not, though it may exist in relation to the experience of the gift of God's agape love as discussed in Chapter 2 when eros is appropriated in a Christian context.

Overall, the contribution to human experience achieved by the Flahertys is significant. For modern Christians, the recovery of eros in its original Greek sense is vital, as the various theologians discussed in Chapter 2 testify. The loss of eros in human life has contributed to some severe problems--characterized by mechanization, manipulation, self-centeredness, loss of value and love and wonder, extreme rationality, and utility. With eros, man can achieve a new relationship to his environment characterized by love, non-exploitation, appreciation, and

reverence. A new perspective on the use of the all-consuming and de-humanizing technology may be gained. A more balanced role for man in the world is possible. And, this of course accords with Jesus' life and teachings--whereby with Jesus, there came to be a new kind of existence in which one's own ego could be transcended in order that a wider perception of the world (and God's activity in it) could be attained. This suspension and transcendence of one's own ego is in harmony with the experience of eros, not to mention the "non-preconception" of the Flahertys. This is significant for the Christian's relations with other people and the rest of God's created world. In this context, Flaherty's work could be easily appropriated in the ministry of the church.

The situation is the same with liberation. The structure of Christian existence (as summarized in the previous paragraph and elaborated on in Chapter 2) relates to liberation as discussed here. The gift of the experience of liberation seems to make for a new relationship of man, God, and the natural world. Liberation opens up for the Christian a new experience of the nature of reality and God's presence in it. Again, this is important to the church as it stimulates reflection on the nature of existence and salvation. With liberation, in the context of the Flahertys' work, the way is opened up also for dialogue with other religions on questions of ultimate spiritual

importance; i.e., mutual insight may be gained on common religious concerns of each, by virtue of a common treatment provided by the nonliterary Flaherty tradition.

In other religious senses, The Flahertys' work is important. With social concerns, the films may better help Christians deal with ecological issues--this due to the films' common theme: the spirit of man coming to terms with his environment. Also, the films raise important ethical questions; e.g., wherein does value lay: in the possession and exploitation of objects or in positive and loving relations with a multiplicity of subject-objects. Secularly, the films can be seen as important anthropological and sociological documents, (though Mrs. Flaherty discounted this idea). Also, secularly, the importance of the tradition's film-making techniques has been discussed. As a body of work, the films are unique in the history of the art; "non-preconceived documentaries" simply have not been made by other film-makers. The films do denote the dawning of a wholly new art form--unrelated to theatre, painting, or any other type of art.

Enough said. The Flaherty tradition comprises a major contribution to human life and thought, opening up and offering fundamental insight to significant areas of contemporary thought and, specifically, religious thought.

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